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Emile Verhaeren.
From an unpublished photograph by
Charles Bernier, 1914.

ÉMILE VERHAEREN

BY

STEFAN ZWEIG

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BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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1914

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PREFACE

FOUR years have passed since the present volume appeared simultaneously in German and French. In the meantime Verhaeren's fame has been spreading; but in English-speaking countries he is still not so well known as he deserves to be.

Something of his philosophy—if it may be called philosophy rather than a poet's inspired visualising of the world—has passed into the public consciousness in a grotesquely distorted form in what is known as 'futurism.' So long as futurism is associated with those who have acquired a facile notoriety by polluting the pure idea, it would be an insult to Verhaeren to suggest that he is to be classed with the futurists commonly so-called; but the whole purpose of the present volume will prove that the gospel of a very serious and reasoned futurism is to be found in Verhaeren's writings.

Of the writer of the book it may be said that there was no one more fitted than he to write the authentic exposition of the teaching which he has hailed as a new religion. His relations to the Master are not only those of a fervent disciple,

but of an apostle whose labour of love has in German-speaking lands and beyond been crowned with signal success. Himself a lyrist of distinction, Stefan Zweig has accomplished the difficult feat, which in this country still waits to be done, of translating the great mass of Verhaeren's poems into actual and enduring verse. Another book of his on Verlaine is already known in an English rendering; so that he bids fair to become known in this country as one of the most gifted of the writers of Young-Vienna.

As to the translation, I have endeavoured to be faithful to my text, which is the expression of a personality. Whatever divergences there are have been necessitated by the lapse of time. For help in reading the proofs I have to thank Mr. M. T. H. Sadler and Mr. Fritz Voigt.

J. BITHELL.

HAMMERFIELD,
Nr. HEMEL HEMPSTEAD,
14*th July* 1914.

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PART I

DECIDING FORCES

LES FLAMANDES—LES MOINES—LES SOIRS—LES DÉBÂCLES—LES FLAMBEAUX NOIRS—AU BORD DE LA ROUTE — LES APPARUS DANS MES CHEMINS

1883-1893

Son tempérament, son caractère, sa vie, tout conspire a nous montrer son art tel que nous avons essayé de le définir. Une profonde unité les scelle. Et n'est-ce pas vers la découverte de cette unité-là, qui groupe en un faisceau solide les gestes, les pensées et les travaux d'un génie sur la terre, que la critique, revenue enfin de tant d'erreurs, devait tendre uniquement ?

Verhaeren, *Rembrandt.*

THE NEW AGE

Tout bouge—et l'on dirait les horizons en marche.
É. V., 'La Foule.'

THE feeling of this age of ours, of this our moment in eternity, is different in its conception of life from that of our ancestors. Only eternal earth has changed not nor grown older, that field, gloomed by the Unknown, on which the monotonous light of the seasons divides, in a rhythmic round, the time of blossoms and of their withering; changeless only are the action of the elements and the restless alternation of night and day. But the aspect of earth's spirit has changed, all that is subjected to the toil of man. Has changed, to change again. The evolution of the phenomena of culture seems to proceed with ever greater rapidity: never was the span of a hundred years as rich, as replete as that which stretches to the threshold of our own days. Cities have shot up which are as huge and bewildering, as impenetrable and as endless, as nothing else has been save those virgin forests now fast receding before the onward march of the tilled land. More and more the work of man achieves the grandiose and elementary character that was once Nature's secret. The lightning is in his hands, and protection from the weather's

sudden onslaughts; lands that once yawned far apart are now forged together by the iron hoop with which of old only the narrow strait was arched; oceans are united that have sought each other for thousands of years; and now in the very air man is building a new road from country to country. All has changed.

Tout a changé : les ténèbres et les flambeaux.
Les droits et les devoirs ont fait d'autres faisceaux,
Du sol jusqu'au soleil, une neuve énergie
Diverge un sang torride, en la vie élargie ;
Des usines de fonte ouvrent, sous le ciel bleu,
Des cratères en flamme et des fleuves en feu ;
De rapides vaisseaux, sans rameurs et sans voiles,
La nuit, sur les flots bleus, étonnent les étoiles ;
Tout peuple réveillé se forge une autre loi ;
Autre est le crime, autre est l'orgueil, autre est l'exploit.[1]

Changed, too, is the relation of individual to individual, of the individual to the whole; at once more onerous and less burdensome is the network of social laws, at once more onerous and less burdensome our whole life.

But a still greater thing has happened. Not only the real forms, the transitory facts of life have changed, not only do we live in other cities, other houses, not only are we dressed in different clothes, but the infinite above us too, that which seemed unshakable, has changed from what it was for our fathers and forefathers. Where the actual changes, the relative changes also. The most elementary forms of our conception, space

[1] 'Aujourd'hui' (*Les Héros*).

and time, have been displaced. Space has become other than it was, for we measure it with new velocities. Roads that took our forefathers days to traverse can now be covered in one short hour; one flying night transports us to warm and luxuriant lands that were once separated from us by the hardships of a long journey. The perilous forests of the tropics with their strange constellations, to see which cost those of old a year of their lives, are of a sudden near to us and easy of access. We measure differently with these different velocities of life. Time is more and more the victor of space. The eye, too, has learned other distances, and in cold constellations is startled to perceive the forms of primeval landscapes petrified; and the human voice seems to have grown a thousand times stronger since it has learned to carry on a friendly conversation a hundred miles away. In this new relationship of forces we have a different perception of the spanning round of the earth, and the rhythm of life, beating more brightly and swiftly, is likewise becoming new for us. The distance from springtime to springtime is greater now and yet less, greater and yet less is the individual hour, greater and less our whole life.

And therefore is it with new feelings that we must comprehend this new age. For we all feel that we must not measure the new with the old measures our forefathers used, that we must not live through the new with feelings outworn, that we

must discover a new sense of distance, a new sense of time, a new sense of space, that we must find a new music for this nervous, feverish rhythm around us. This new-born human conditionality calls for a new morality; this new union of equals a new beauty; this new topsy-turvydom a new system of ethics. And this new confrontation with another and still newer world, with another Unknown, demands a new religion, a new God. A new sense of the universe is, with a muffled rumour, welling up in the hearts of all of us.

New things, however, must be coined into new words. A new age calls for new poets, poets whose conceptions have been nurtured by their environment, poets who, in the expression they give to this new environment, themselves vibrate with the feverish rotation of life. But so many of our poets are pusillanimous. They feel that their voices are out of harmony with reality; they feel that they are not incorporated with the new organism and a necessary part of it; they have a dull foreboding that they do not speak the language of our contemporary life. In our great cities they are like strangers stranded. The great roaring streams of our new sensations are to them terrific and inconceivable. They are ready to accept all the comfort and luxury of modern life; they are quick to take advantage of the facilities afforded by technical science and organisation; but for their poetry they reject these phenomena, because they cannot master

them. They recoil from the task of transmuting poetical values, of sensing whatever is poetically new in these new things. And so they stand aside. They flee from the real, the contemporary, to the immutable; they take refuge in whatsoever the eternal evolution has left untouched; they sing the stars, the springtime, the babbling of springs which is now as it ever was, the myth of love; they hide behind the old symbols; they nestle to the old gods. Not from the moment, from the molten flowing ore, do they seize and mould the eternal—no, as ever of old they dig the symbols of the eternal out of the cold clay of the past, like old Greek statues. They are not on that account insignificant; but at best they produce something important, never anything necessary.

For only that poet can be necessary to our time who himself feels that everything in this time is necessary, and therefore beautiful. He must be one whose whole endeavour as poet and man it is to make his own sensations vibrate in unison with contemporary sensations; who makes the rhythm of his poem nothing else than the echoed rhythm of living things; who adjusts the beat of his verse to the beat of our own days, and takes into his quivering veins the streaming blood of our time. He must not on this account, when seeking to create new ideals, be a stranger to the ideals of old; for all true progress is based on the deepest understanding of the past. Pro-

gress must be for him as Guyau interprets it: 'Le pouvoir, lorsqu'on est arrivé à un état supérieur, d'éprouver des émotions et des sensations nouvelles, sans cesser d'être encore accessible à ce que contenaient de grand ou de beau ses précédantes émotions.' [1] A poet of our time can only be great when he conceives this time as great. The preoccupations of his time must be his also; its social problem must be his personal concern. In such a poet succeeding generations would see how man has fought a way to them from the past, how in every moment as it passed he has wrestled to identify the feeling of his own mind with that of the cosmos. And even though the great works of such a poet should be soon disintegrated and his poems obsolete, though his images should have paled, there would yet remain imperishably vivid that which is of greater moment, the invisible motives of his inspiration, the melody, the breath, the rhythm of his time. Such poets, besides pointing the way to the coming generation, are in a deeper sense the incarnation of their own period. Hence the time has come to speak of Émile Verhaeren, the greatest of modern poets, and perhaps the only one who has been conscious of what is poetical in contemporary feeling, the only one who has shaped that feeling in verse, the first poet who, with skill incomparably inspired, has chiselled our epoch into a mighty monument of rhyme.

[1] Guyau, *L'Esthétique Contemporaine.*

In Verhaeren's work our age is mirrored. The new landscapes are in it; the sinister silhouettes of the great cities; the seething masses of a militant democracy; the subterranean shafts of mines; the last heavy shadows of silent, dying cloisters. All the intellectual forces of our time, our time's ideology, have here become a poem; the new social ideas, the struggle of industrialism with agrarianism, the vampire force which lures the rural population from the health-giving fields to the burning quarries of the great city, the tragic fate of emigrants, financial crises, the dazzling conquests of science, the syntheses of philosophy, the triumphs of engineering, the new colours of the impressionists. All the manifestations of the new age are here reflected in a poet's soul in their action—first confused, then understood, then joyfully acclaimed—on the sensations of a New European. How this work came into being, out of what resistance and crises a poet has here conquered the consciousness of the necessity and then of the beauty of the new cosmic phase, it shall be our task to show. If the time has indeed come to class Verhaeren, it is not so much with the poets that his place will be found. He does not so much stand with or above the verse-smiths or actual artists in verse, with the musicians, or painters, as rather with the great organisers, those who have forced the new social currents to flow between dikes; with the legislators who prevent the clashing of flamboyant

energies; with the philosophers, who aim at co-ordinating and unifying all these vastly complicated tendencies in one brilliant synthesis. His poetry is a created poet's world; it is a resolute shaping of phases, a considered new æstheticism, and a conscious new inspiration. He is not only the poet, he is at the same time the preacher of our time. He was the first to conceive of it as *beautiful*, but not like those who, in their zeal for embellishment, tone down the dark colours and bring out the bright ones; he has conceived of it—we shall have to show with what a painful and intensive effort—after his first most obstinate rejection of it, as a necessity, and he has then transformed this conception of its necessity, of its purpose, into beauty. Ceasing to look backwards, he has looked forwards. He feels, quite in the spirit of evolution, in the spirit of Nietzsche, that our generation is raised high above all the past, that it is the summit of all that is past, and the turning-point towards the future. This will perhaps seem too much to many people, who are inclined to call our generation wretched and paltry, as though they had some inner knowledge of the magnificence or the paltriness of generations gone. For every generation only becomes great by the men who do not despair of it, only becomes great by its poets who conceive of it as great, by its charioteers of state who have confidence in its power of greatness. Of Shakespeare and Hugo

Verhaeren says: 'Ils grandissaient leur siècle.'[1] They did not depict it with the perspective of others, but out of the heart of their own greatness. Of such geniuses as Rembrandt he says: 'Si plus tard, dans l'éloignement des siècles, ils semblent traduire mieux que personne leur temps, c'est qu'ils l'ont recréé d'après leur cerveau, et qu'ils l'ont imposé non pas tel qu'il était, mais tel qu'ils l'ont déformé.'[2] But by magnifying their century, by raising even ephemeral events of their own days into a vast perspective, they themselves became great. While those who of set purpose diminish, and while those by nature indifferent, are themselves diminished and disregarded as the centuries recede, poets such as these we honour tell, like illumined belfry clocks, the hour of the time to generations yet to come. If the others bequeath some slight possession, a poem or so, aphorisms, a book maybe, these survive more mightily: they survive in some great conception, some great idea of an age, in that music of life to which the faint-hearted and the ungifted of following epochs will listen as it sounds from the past, because they in their turn are unable to understand the rhythm of their own time. By this manner of inspired vision Verhaeren has come to be the great poet of our time, by approving of it as well as by depicting it, by the fact that he did not see the new things as they actually are, but celebrated them

[1] 'L'Art' (*Les Forces Tumultueuses*). [2] *Rembrandt.*

as a new beauty. He has approved of all that is in our epoch ; of everything, to the very resistance to it which he has conceived of as only a welcome augmentation of the fighting force of our vitality. The whole atmosphere of our time seems compressed in the organ music of his work ; and whether he touches the bright keys or the dark, whether he rolls out a lofty diapason or strikes a gentle concord, it is always the onward-rushing force of our time that vibrates in his poems. While other poets have grown ever more lifeless and languid, ever more secluded and disheartened, Verhaeren's voice has grown ever more resonant and vigorous, like an organ indeed, full of reverence and the mystical power of sublime prayer. A spirit positively religious, not of despondency, however, but of confidence and joy, breathes from this music of his, freshening and quickening the blood, till the world takes on brighter and more animated and more generous colours, and our vitality, fired by the fever of his verse, flashes with a richer and younger and more virile flame.

But the fact that life, to-day of all days, needs nothing so urgently as the freshening and quickening of our vitality, is good reason why—quite apart from all literary admiration—we must read his books, is good reason why this poet must be discussed with all that glad enthusiasm which we have first learned for our lives from his work.

THE NEW BELGIUM

Entre la France ardente et la grave Allemagne.
É. V., 'Charles le Téméraire.'

In Belgium the roads of Europe meet. A few hours transport one from Brussels, the heart of its iron arteries, to Germany, France, Holland, and England; and from Belgian ports all countries and all races are accessible across the pathless sea. The area of the land being small, it provides a miniature but infinitely varied synthesis of the life of Europe. All contrasts stand face to face concisely and sharply outlined. The train roars through the land: now past coal-mines, past furnaces and retorts that write the fiery script of toil on an ashen sky; now through golden fields or green pastures where sleek, brindled cows are grazing; now through great cities that point to heaven with their multitudinous chimneys; and lastly to the sea, the Rialto of the north, where mountains of cargoes are shipped and unshipped, and trade traffics with a thousand hands. Belgium is an agricultural land and an industrial land; it is at the same time conservative and socialistic, Roman Catholic and free-thinking; at once wealthy and wretched. There are colossal fortunes heaped up

in the monster cities; and two hours thence the bitterest poverty sweats for the dole of a living in mines and barns. And again in the cities still greater forces wrestle with one another: life and death, the past and the future. Towns monkishly secluded, girt with ponderous mediæval walls, towns on whose swart and sedgy canals lonely swans glide like milky gondolas, towns like a dream, strengthless, prisoned in sleep eternal. At no great distance glitter the modern residential cities; Brussels with its glaring boulevards, where electric inscriptions dart coruscating up and down the fronts of buildings, where motor-cars whiz along, where the streets rumble, and modern life twitches with feverish nerves. Contrast on contrast. From the right the Teutonic tide dashes in, the Protestant faith; from the left, sumptuous and rigidly orthodox, Roman Catholicism. And the race itself is the restlessly struggling product of two races, the Flemish and the Walloon. Naked, clear, and direct are the contrasts which here defy each other; and the whole battle can be surveyed at a glance.

But so strong, so persistent is the inexorable pressure of the two neighbouring races, that this blend has already become a new ferment, a new race. Elements once contrary are now unrecognisably mixed in a new and growing product. Teutons speak French, people of Romance stock are Flemish in feeling. Pol de Mont, in spite of his Gallic name, is a Flemish poet; Verhaeren,

Maeterlinck, and van Lerberghe, though no Frenchman can pronounce their names rightly, are French poets. And this new Belgian race is a strong race, one of the most capable in Europe. Contact with so many foreign cultures, the vicinity of such contradictory nations, has fertilised them; healthy rural labour has steeled their limbs; the near sea has opened their eyes to the great distances. Their consciousness of themselves is of no long date: it can only be reckoned from the time when their country became independent, hardly a hundred years ago. A nation younger than America, they are in their adolescence now, and rejoicing in their new, unsought strength. And just as in America, the blend of races here, together with the fruitful, healthy fields, has procreated robust men. For the Belgian race is a race pulsing with vitality. Nowhere in Europe is life so intensely, so merrily enjoyed as in Flanders, nowhere else is sensuality and pleasure in excess so much the measure of strength. They must be seen particularly in their sensual life; it must be seen how the Flemish enjoy; with what greediness, with what a conscious pleasure and robust endurance. It is among them that Jordaens found the models for his gluttonous orgies; and they could be found still at every kermesse, at every wake. Statistics prove that in the consumption of alcohol Belgium stands to-day at the head of Europe. Every second house is

an inn, an *estaminet*; every town, every village has its brewery; and the brewers are the wealthiest men in the country. Nowhere else are festivals so loud, boisterous, and unbridled; nowhere else is life loved and lived with such a superabundant zest and glow. Belgium is the land of excessive vitality, and ever was so. They have fought for this plenitude of life, for this enjoyment full to satiety. Their most heroic exploit, their great war with the Spaniards, was only a struggle not so much for religion as for sensual freedom. These desperate revolts, this immense effort was in reality not directed against Roman Catholicism, but against the morality, the asceticism it enforced; not so much against Spain as against the sinister malignity of the Inquisition; against the taciturn, bitter, and insidious Puritanism which sought to curtail enjoyment; against the morose reserve of Philip II. All that they wanted at that time was to preserve their bright and laughing life, their free, dionysiac enjoyment, the imperious avidity of their senses; they were determined not to be limited by any measure short of excess. And with them life conquered. Health, strength, and fecundity is to this very day the mark of the Belgian people in town and country. Poverty itself is not hollow-cheeked and stunted here. Chubby, red-cheeked children play in the streets; the peasants working in the fields are straight and sturdy; even the artisans are as muscular

and strong as they are in Constantin Meunier's bronzes; the women are moulded to bear children easily; the unbroken vigour of the old men persists in a secure defiance of age. Constantin Meunier was fifty when he began his life-work here; at sixty Verhaeren is at the zenith of his creative power. Insatiable seems the strength of this race, whose deepest feeling has been chiselled by Verhaeren in proud stanzas:

> Je suis le fils de cette race,
> Dont les cerveaux plus que les dents
> Sont solides et sont ardents
> Et sont voraces.
> Je suis le fils de cette race
> Tenace,
> Qui veut, après avoir voulu
> Encore, encore et encore plus ! [1]

This tremendous exertion has not been in vain. To-day Belgium is relatively the richest country in Europe. Its colony of the Congo is ten times as extensive as the mother-land. The Belgians hardly know where to place their capital: Belgian money is invested in Russia, in China, in Japan; they are concerned in all enterprises; their financiers control trusts in all countries. The middle classes, too, are healthy, strong, and contented.

Such rich and healthy blood is more likely than any other to produce good art, and, above all, art full of the zest of life. For it is in countries

[1] 'Ma Race' (*Les Forces Tumultueuses*).

with few possibilities of expansion that the desire for artistic activity is keenest. The imagination of great nations is for the most part absorbed by the practical demands of their development. The best strength of a great nation is claimed by politics, by administration, by the army and navy; but where political life is of necessity poor, where the problems of administration are forcibly restricted, men of genius almost exclusively seek their conquests in the domains of art. Scandinavia is one example, Belgium another, of countries in which the aristocracy of intellect have with the happiest results been forced back on art and science. In such young races the vital instinct must *a priori* make all artistic activity strong and healthy; and even when they produce a decadence, this reaction, this contradiction, is so decided and consequent, that strength lies in its very weakness. For only a strong light can cast strong shadows; only a strong, sensual race can bring forth the really great and earnest mystics; because a decided reaction which is conscious of its aim requires as much energy as positive creation.

The towering structure of Belgian art rests on a broad foundation. The preparation, the growing under the sod, took fifty years; and then in another fifty years it was reared aloft by the youth of one single generation. For every healthy evolution is slow, most of all in the Teutonic races, which are not so quick, supple, and

dexterous as the Latin races, who learn by life itself rather than by studious application. This literature has grown ring by ring like a tree, with its roots deep in a healthy soil nourished by the unyielding perseverance of centuries. Like every confession of faith, this literature has its saints, its martyrs, and its disciples. The first of the creators, the forerunner, was Charles de Coster; and his great epic *Thyl Ulenspiegel* is the gospel of this new literature. His fate is sad, like that of all pioneers. In him the native blend of races is more plastically visualised than in all later writers. Of Teutonic extraction, he was born in Munich, wrote in French, and was the first man to feel as a Belgian. He earned his living painfully as a teacher at the Military School. And when his great romance appeared, it was difficult to find a publisher, and still more difficult to find appreciation, or even notice. And yet this work, with its wonderful confrontation of Ulenspiegel as the deliverer of Flanders with Philip II. as Antichrist, is to this day the most beautiful symbol of the struggle of light with darkness, of vitality with renunciation; an enduring monument in the world's literature, because it is the epic of a whole nation. With such a work of wide import did Belgian literature begin, a work that with its heroic battles stands like the Iliad as the proud and primitive beginning of a more delicate, but in its advanced culture more complex, literature. The place of

this writer, who died prematurely, was taken by Camille Lemonnier, who accepted the hard task and the melancholy inheritance of pioneers —ingratitude and disillusion. Of this proud and noble character also one must speak as of a hero. For more than forty years he fought indefatigably for Belgium, a soldier leading the onset from first to last, launching book after book, creating, writing, calling to the fray and marshalling the new forces; and never resting till the adjective 'Belgian' ceased in Paris and Europe to be spoken with the contempt that attaches to 'provincial'; till, like once the name of the Gueux, what was originally a disgrace became a title of honour. Fearlessly, not to be discouraged by any failure, this superb writer sung his native land—fields, mines, towns, and men; the angry, fiery blood of youths and maidens; and over all the ardent yearning for a brighter, freer, greater religion, for rapt communion with the sublimity of Nature. With the ecstatic revelling in colour of his illustrious ancestor Rubens, who gathered all the things of life together in a glad festival of the senses, he, like a second voluptuary at the feast, has lavished colours, had his joy of all that is glowing, and glaring, and satiated, and, like every genuine artist, conceived of art as an intensifying of life, as life in intoxication. For more than forty years he created in this sense, and miraculously, just like the men of his country, like the peasants

he painted, he waxed in vigour from year to year, from harvest to harvest, his books growing ever more fiery, ever more drunken with the zest and glow of life, his faith in life ever brighter and more confident. He was the first to feel the strength of his young country with conscious pride, and his voice rang out its loud appeal for new fighters till he no longer stood alone, till a company of other artists were ranged around him. Each of these he supported and firmly established, with a strong grip placing them at their vantage for the battle; and without envy, nay with joy, he saw his own work triumphantly overshadowed by the acclaimed creations of his juniors. With joy, because he probably considered not his own novels, but this creation of a literature his greatest and most lasting work. For it seemed as though in these years the whole land had become alive; as though every town, every profession, every class had sent forth a poet or a painter to immortalise them; as though this whole Belgium were eager to be symbolised in individual phases in works of art, until he should come who was destined to transform all towns and classes in a poem, enshrining in it the harmonised soul of the land. Are not the ancient Teutonic cities of Bruges, Courtrai, and Ypres spiritualised in the stanzas of Rodenbach, in the pastels of Fernand Khnopff, in the mystic statues of Georges Minne? Have not the sowers of corn and the workers in mines become

stone in the busts of Constantin Meunier ? Does not a great drunkenness glow in Georges Eekhoud's descriptions ? The mystic art of Maeterlinck and Huysmans drinks its deepest strength from old cloisters and *béguinages* ; the sun of the fields of Flanders glows in the pictures of Théo van Rysselberghe and Claus. The delicate walking of maidens and the singing of belfries have been made music in the stanzas of the gentle Charles van Lerberghe ; the vehement sensuality of a savage race has been spiritualised in the refined eroticism of Félicien Rops. The Walloons have their representative in Albert Mockel ; and how many others might still be named of the great creators : the sculptor van der Stappen ; the painters Heymans, Stevens ; the writers des Ombiaux, Demolder, Glesener, Crommelynck ; who have all in their confident and irresistible advance conquered the esteem of France and the admiration of Europe. For they, and just they, were gifted with a sense of the great complex European feeling which in their work is glimpsed in its birth and growth ; for they did not in their idea of a native land stop at the boundaries of Belgium, but included all the neighbouring countries, because they were at the same time patriots and cosmopolitans : Belgium was to them not only the place where all roads meet, but also that whence all roads start.

Each of these had shaped his native land from his own angle of vision ; a whole phalanx of

artists had added picture to picture. Till then this great one came, Verhaeren, who saw, felt, and loved everything in Flanders, 'toute la Flandre.' Only in his work did it become a unity; for he has sung everything, land and sea, towns and workshops, cities dead and cities at their birth. He has not conceived of this Flanders of his as a separate phase, as a province, but as the heart of Europe, with the strength of its blood pulsing inwards from outside and outside from inwards; he has opened out horizons beyond the frontiers, and heightened and connected them; and with the same inspiration he has molten and welded the individual together with the whole until out of his work a life-work grew—the lyric epic of Flanders. What de Coster half a century before had not dared to fashion from the present, in which he despaired of finding pride, power, and the heroism of life, Verhaeren has realised; and thus he has become the 'carillonneur de la Flandre,' the bell-ringer who, as in olden days from the watch-tower, has summoned the whole land to the defence of its will to live, and the nation to the pride and consciousness of its power.

This Verhaeren could only do, because he in himself represents all the contrasts, all the advantages of the Belgian race. He too is a ferment of contrasts, a new man made of split and divergent forces now victoriously harmonised. From the French he has his language and his form;

from the Germans his instinctive seeking of God, his earnestness, his gravity, his need of metaphysics, and his impulse to pantheism. Political instincts, religious instincts, Catholicism and socialism, have struggled in him; he is at once a dweller in great cities and a cottager in the open country; and the deepest impulse of his people, their lack of moderation and their greed of life, is in the last instance the maxim of his poetic art. Only that their pleasure in intoxication has in him become joy in a noble drunkenness, in ecstasy; only that their carnal joy has become a delight in colour; that their mad raging is now in him a pleasure in a rhythm that roars and thunders and bursts in foam. The deepest thing in his race, an inflexible vitality which is not to be shaken by crises or catastrophes, has in him become universal law, a conscious, intensified zest in life. For when a country has become strong and rejoices in its strength, it needs, like every plethora, a cry, an exultation. Just as Walt Whitman was the exultation of America in its new strength, Verhaeren is the triumph of the Belgian race, and of the European race too. For this glad confession of life is so strong, so glowing, so virile that it cannot be thought of as breaking forth from the heart of one individual, but is evidently the delight of a fresh young nation in its beautiful and yet unfathomed power.

YOUTH IN FLANDERS

Seize, dix-sept et dix-huit ans !
O ce désir d'être avant l'âge et le vrai temps
Celui
Dont chacun dit
Il boit à larges brocs et met à mal les filles !
É. V., *Les Tendresses Premières.*

THE history of modern Belgian literature begins, by a whim of chance, in one and the same house. In Ghent, the favourite city of the Emperor Charles V., in the old, heavy Flemish town that is still girdled with ramparts, lies, remote from the noisy streets, the grey Jesuit college of Sainte-Barbe. A cloister with thick, cold, frowning walls, mute corridors, silent refectories, reminding one somewhat of the beautiful colleges in Oxford, save that here there is no ivy softening the walls, and no flowers to lay their variegated carpet over the green courts. Here, in the seventies, two strange pairs of boys meet on the school-benches ; here among thousands of names are four which are destined in later days to be the pride of their country. First, Georges Rodenbach and Émile Verhaeren, then Maeterlinck and Charles van Lerberghe—two pairs of friendships, both of which are now torn asunder by death. The weaker, the more delicate of the four,

Georges Rodenbach and Charles van Lerberghe, have died; Émile Verhaeren and Maeterlinck, the two heroes of Flanders, are still growing and not yet at the zenith of their fame. But all four began their course in the old college. The Jesuit fathers taught them their humanities, and even to write poems—in Latin, it is true, to begin with; and in this exercise, strange to say, Maeterlinck was excelled by van Lerberghe with his more instinctive sense of form, and Verhaeren by the more supple Georges Rodenbach. With rigorous earnestness the fathers trained them to respect the past, to have faith in conventional things, to think in old grooves, and to hate innovations. The aim was not only to keep them Catholics, but to win them for the priesthood: these cloister walls were to protect them from the hostile breath of the new world, from the freshening wind which, in Flanders as everywhere else, was assailing the growing generation.

But in these four pupils the aim was not realised, least of all in Verhaeren, perhaps for the very reason that he, as the scion of a strictly orthodox family, was the most fitted to be a priest; because his mind did not absorb conviction mechanically, but achieved it by vital processes; because his inmost being was self-surrender and a glowing devotion to great ideas. However, the call of the open country, in which he had grown up, was too strong in him; the voice of life was too loud in his blood for so early

a renunciation of all; his mind was too tameless to be satisfied with the established and the traditional. The impressions of his childhood were more vivid than the teaching of his masters. For Verhaeren was born in the country, at St. Amand on the Scheldt (on the 21st of May 1855), where the landscape rolls to the vast horizons of the heath and the sea. Here in the happiest manner kindly circumstances wove the garland of his earlier years. His parents were well-to-do people who had retired from the din of the town to this little corner of Flanders; here they had a cottage of their own, with a front garden ablaze with flowers of all colours. And immediately behind the house began the great golden fields, the tangle of flowering hedgerows; and close by was the river with its slow waves hasting no longer, feeling the nearness of their goal, the infinite ocean. Of the untrammelled days of his boyhood the ageing poet has told us in his wonderful book *Les Tendresses Premières*. He has told us of the boy he was when he ran across country; clambered into the corn-loft where the glittering grain was heaped; climbed steeples; watched the peasants at their sowing and reaping; and listened to the maids at the washing-tub singing old Flemish songs. He watched all trades; he rummaged in every corner. He would sit with the watch-maker, marvelling at the humming little wheels that fashioned the hour; and no less to see the glowing maw of the

oven in the bakery swallowing the corn which only the day before had glided through his fingers in rustling ears, and was now already bread, golden, warm, and odorous. At games he would watch in astonishment the glad strength of the young fellows tumbling the reeling skittles over; and he would wander with the playing band from village to village, from fair to fair. And, sitting on the bank of the Scheldt, he would watch the ships, with their coloured streamers, come and go, and in his dreams follow them to the vast distances, which he only knew from sailors' yarns and pictures in old books. All this, this daily physical familiarity with the things of Nature, this lived insight into the thousand activities of the working-day, became his inalienable possession. Inalienable, too, was the humane feeling he acquired that he was one at heart with the people of his village. From them he learned the names of all these thousand things, and the intelligence of the mysterious mechanism in all skilled handiwork, and all the petty cares and perplexities of these many scattered little souls of life which, combined, are the soul of a whole land. And therefore Verhaeren is the only one among modern poets in the French tongue who is really popular with his countrymen of all ranks. He still goes in and out among them as their equal, sits in their circle even now, when fame has long since shown him his place among the best and noblest, chats with

the peasants in the village inn, and loves to hear them discussing the weather and the harvest and the thousand little things of their narrow world. He belongs to them, and they belong to him. He loves their life, their cares, their labour, loves this whole land with its tempests raging from the north, with its hail and snow, its thundering sea and lowering clouds. It is with pride that he claims kindred with his race and land; and indeed there is often in his gait and in his gestures something of the peasant trampling with heavy steps and hard knee after his plough; and his eyes 'are grey as his native sea, his hair is yellow like the corn of his fields.' These elemental forces are in his whole being and production. You feel that he has never lost touch with Nature, that he is still organically connected with the fields, the sea, the open air; he to whom spring is physically painful, who is depressed by relaxing air, who loves the weather of his homeland, its vehemence, and its savage, tameless strength.

For this very reason he has in later years felt what was natively uncongenial to him—the great cities—differently and far more intensely than poets brought up in them. What to the latter appeared self-evident was to him astonishment, abomination, terror, admiration, and love. For him the atmosphere we breathe in cities was heavy, stifling, poisoned; the streets between the massed houses were too narrow, too con-

gested; hourly, at first in pain and then with admiration, he has felt the beautiful fearfulness of the vast dimensions, the strangeness of the new forms of life. Just as we walk through mountain ravines dumbfounded and terrified by their sublimity, he has walked through streets of cities, first slowly accustoming himself to them; thus he has explored them, described them, celebrated them, and in the deepest sense lived them. Their fever has streamed into his blood; their revolts have reared in him like wild horses; their haste and unrest has whipped his nerves for half the span of a man's life. But then he has returned home again. In his fifties he has taken refuge once more in his fields, under the lonely sky of Flanders. He lives in a lonely cottage somewhere in Belgium, where the railway does not reach, enjoying himself among cheerful and simple people who fill their days with plain labour, like the friends and companions of his boyhood. With a joy intensified he goes eagerly year by year to the sea, as though his lungs and his heart needed it to breathe strongly again, to feel life with more jubilant enthusiasm. In the man of sixty there is a wonderful return of his healthy, happy childhood; and to the Flanders that inspired his first verses his last have been dedicated.

Against this atavism, against this bright and inalienable joy in life, the *patres* of Sainte-Barbe could do nothing. They could only deflect his

great hunger of life from material things, and turn it in the direction of science, of art. The priest they sought to make of him he has really become, only he has preached everything that they proscribed, and fought against everything that they praised. At the time Verhaeren leaves school, he is already filled with that noble yet feverish greed of life, that tameless yearning for intensive enjoyments heightened to the degree of pain which is so characteristic of him. The priesthood was repugnant to him. Nor was he more allured by the prospect, held out to him, of directing his uncle's workshop. It is not yet definitely the poetic vocation which appeals to him, but he does desire a free active calling with unlimited possibilities. To gain time for his final decision, he studies jurisprudence, and becomes a barrister. In these student years in Louvain Verhaeren gave free rein to his untameable zest in life; as a true Fleming he eschewed moderation and launched into intemperance. To this very day he is fond of telling of his liking for good Belgian beer, and of how the students got drunk, danced at all the kermesses, caroused and feasted, when the fury came over them, and got into all kinds of mischief, which often enough brought them into conflict with the police. Uncertainty was never a feature of his character, and so his Roman Catholicism was in those years no silent and impersonal faith, but a militant orthodoxy. A handful of hotspurs—the

publisher Deman was one of them, and another was the tenor van Dyck—set a newspaper going, in which they lashed away mercilessly at the corruption of the modern world, and did not forget to blow their own trumpets. The university was not slow to veto these immature manifestations; but ere long they started a second periodical, which was, however, more in harmony with the great contemporary movements. Betweenwhiles verses were written. And still more passionate is the young poet's activity when, in the year 1881, he is called to the bar in Brussels. Here he makes friends with men of great vitality: he is welcomed by a circle of painters and artists, and a cénacle of young talents is formed who have the authentic enthusiasm for art, and who feel that they are violently opposed to the conservative bourgeoisie of Brussels. Verhaeren, who at this time greedily adopts all fashionable freakishness as something new, and struts about in fantastic apparel, promptly acquires notoriety by his vehement passionateness and his first literary attempts. He had begun to write verse in his school-days. Lamartine had been his model, then Victor Hugo, who bewitches young people, that lord of magnificent gestures, that undisputed master of words. These juvenilia of Verhaeren have never been published, and probably they have little interest, for in them his tameless vitality attempted expression in immaculate Alexandrines. More

and more, as his artistic insight grew, he felt that his vocation was to be a poet; the meagre success he achieved as a barrister confirmed him in this conviction, and so in the end, following the advice of Edmond Picard, he discarded the barrister's gown, which now seemed to him as narrow and stifling as he had once thought the priest's cassock to be.

And then came the hour, the first decisive hour. Lemonnier was as fond of relating it as is Verhaeren; both would speak of it with their fervent, proud joy in a friendship of over thirty years; both with heartfelt admiration, the one for the other. Once, it was a rainy day, Verhaeren burst in on Lemonnier, whom he did not know, trampling into the elder man's lodging with his heavy peasant's tread, hailing him with his hearty gesture, and blurting out: 'Je veux vous lire des vers!' It was the manuscript of his first book *Les Flamandes*; and now he recited, while the rain poured down outside, with his hard voice and sharp scansion, his great enthusiasm and his compelling gestures, those pictures, palpitating with life, of Flanders, that first free confession of patriotism and foaming vitality. And Lemonnier encouraged him, congratulated him, helped him, and suggested alterations, and soon the book appeared, to the terror of Verhaeren's strictly orthodox family, to the horror of the critics, who were helpless in the face of such an explosion of strength. Execrated

and lauded, it immediately compelled interest. In Belgium, it is true, it was less acclaimed than declaimed against; but nevertheless it everywhere excited a commotion, and that grumbling unrest which always heralds the advent of a new force.

'LES FLAMANDES'

Je suis le fils de cette race
Tenace,
Qui veut, après avoir voulu
Encore, encore et encore plus.
É. V., *Ma Race.*

The life-work of great artists contains not only a single, but a threefold work of art. The actual creation is only the first, and not always the most important; the second must be the life of the artists themselves; the third must be the harmoniously finished, organically connected relationship between the act of creating and the thing created, between poetry and life. To survey how inner growth is connected with external formation, how crises of physical reality are connected with artistic decadence, how development and completion interpenetrate as much in personal experience as in the artistic creation, must be an equal artistic rapture, must disengage as pure a line of beauty as the individual work. In Verhaeren these conditions of the threefold work of art are accomplished in full. Harsh and abrupt as the contrasts in his books seem to be, the totality of his development is yet rounded off to a clear line, to the figure of a circle. In the beginning the end was contained, and in the end

the beginning: the bold curve returns to itself. Like one who travels round the world and circles the vast circumference of the globe, he comes back in the end to his starting-point. Beginning and end touch in the motive of his work. To the country to which his youth belonged his old age returns: Flanders inspired his first book, and to Flanders his last books are dedicated.

True it is, between these two books *Les Flamandes* and *Les Blés Mouvants*, between the work of the man of five-and-twenty and that of the man of sixty, lies the world of an evolution with all its points of view and achievements. Only now, when the line that was at first so capricious has returned to itself, can its form be surveyed and its harmony perceived. A purely external observation has become penetration: the eye no longer exclusively regards the external phenomena of things, but all has been seized in his soul from within and imaged in accordance with its reality. Now nothing is seen isolated, from the point of view of curiosity or passing interest, but everything is looked upon as something that is, that has grown, and that is still growing. The motive is the same in the first and in the last books; only, in the first book we have isolated contemplation, while in the great creations of the last period the vast horizons of the modern world are set behind the scenes, with the shadows of the past on the one side, and, as well, with fiery presentiments of the future

shedding a new light over the landscape. The painter, who only portrayed the outer surface, the patina, has developed into the poet, he who in a musical vibration vivifies the psychic and the inconceivable. These two works stand in the same relation to each other as Wagner's first operas, *Rienzi* and *Tannhäuser*, do to his later creations, to the *Ring* and *Parsifal*: what was at first only intuitive becomes consciously creative. And as in Wagner's case, so too with Verhaeren there are to this very day people who prefer the works that are still prisoned in the traditional form to those which were created later, and who are thus, in reality, greater strangers to the poet than those who, from principle, assume a hostile attitude to his artistic work.

Les Flamandes, Verhaeren's first work, appeared in a period of literary commotion. Zola's realistic novels had just become the object of discussion; and they had stirred up, not France only, but the adjacent countries as well. In Belgium Camille Lemonnier was the interpreter of this new naturalism, which regarded absolute truth as more important than beauty, and which saw the sole aim of imaginative literature in photography, in the exact, scientifically accurate reproduction of reality. To-day, now that excessive naturalism has been overcome, we know that this theory only brings us half-way along the road; that beauty may live by the side of

truth; that on the other hand truth is not identical with art, but that it was only necessary to establish a transmutation of the value of beauty; that it was in the actual, in realities, that beauty was to be sought. Every new theory, if it is to succeed, needs a strong dose of exaggeration. And the idea of realising reality in poetry seduced young Verhaeren into carefully avoiding, in the description of his native province, all that is sentimental and romantic, and deluded him with the hope of expressing in his verse only what is coarse, primitive, and savage. Something external and something internal, nature and intention, combined to cause this effect. For the hatred of all that is soft and weak, rounded off and in repose, is in Verhaeren's blood. His temperament was from the first fiery, and loved to respond to strong provocation with a violent blow. There was ever in him a love of the brutal, the hard, the rough, the angular; he had always a liking for what is glaring and intensive, loud and noisy. It is only in his latest books that, thanks to his cooler blood, he has attained classical perfection and purity. In those days, moreover, his hatred of sentimental idealisation, the hatred that in Germany fulminated against Defregger's drawing-room Tyrolese, Auerbach's scented peasants, and the spruce mythology of poetical pictures, led him deliberately to emphasise what is brutal, unæsthetic, and, as it was then felt, unpoetical;

led him, as it were, to trample with heavy shoes in the tedious footsteps of French poets. Barbarian: this was the word they tried to kill him with, not so much on account of the harshness and coarseness of his diction, which often reminds one of the guttural sounds of German, as because of the savage selection of his instinct, which always preferred what is ringingly resonant and ferociously alive, which never fed on nectar and ambrosia, but tore red and steaming shreds of flesh from the body of life. And genuinely barbarous, savage with Teutonic strength, is this his inroad into French literature, reminding one of those migrations of the Teutons into the Latin lands, where they rushed ponderously to battle with wild and raucous cries, to learn, after a time, a higher culture and the finer instincts of life from those they had conquered. Verhaeren in this book does not describe what is amiable and dreamy in Flanders, not idylls, but 'les fureurs d'estomac, de ventre et de débauche,' [1] all the explosions of the lust of life, the orgies of peasants, and even of the animal world. Before him, his old schoolfellow Rodenbach had described Flanders to the French in poems that sounded gently with a silvery note, like the peal of belfries hovering over roofs; he had reminded them of that unforgettable melancholy of the evening over the canals of Bruges, of the magic of the moonlight over fields framed with dikes

[1] 'Les Vieux Maîtres' (*Les Flamandes*).

and hedges of willows. But Verhaeren closes his ears to hints of death; he describes life at its maddest, 'le décor monstrueux des grasses kermesses,' [1] popular festivals, in which intoxication and sensual pleasure sting the unbridled strength of the crowd, in which the demands of the body and the greed of money come into conflict, and the bestial nature of man overthrows the painfully learned lessons of morality. And even in these descriptions, which often teem with the exuberance of Rabelais, one feels that even this explosive life is not mad enough for him, that he yearns to intensify life out and beyond reality: 'jadis les gars avaient les reins plus fermes et les garces plus beau téton.' [2] These young fellows are too weak for him, the wenches too gentle; he cries for the Flanders of olden time, as it lives in the glowing pictures of Rubens and Jordaens and Breughel. These are his true masters, they, the revellers, who created their masterpieces between two orgies, whose laughter and feasting ring into the motives of their pictures. Some of the poems in *Les Flamandes* are direct imitations of certain interiors and sensual genre-pictures: lads afire with lust forcing wenches under the hedges; peasants in their drunken jubilation dancing round the inn table. His desire is to sing that superabundance of vitality which relieves itself by excess,

[1] 'Les Vieux Maîtres' (*Les Flamandes*).
[2] 'Truandailles' (*Ibid.*).

excess flung into excess, even in sensual pleasures. And his own colours and words, which are laid on with lavish profusion and flow along in liquid fire, are themselves a debauch, a 'rut' (a favourite word of his). This vaunting display of seething pictures is nothing less than an orgy. A terrific sensuality rages to exhaustion as much in the execution as in the motive, a delight in these creatures who have the madness of rutting stallions, who root about in odorous meats and in the flowering flesh of women, who of set purpose gorge themselves with beer and wine, and then in the dance and in embraces discharge all the fire they have swallowed. Now and again a reposeful picture alternates, firmly fixed in the dark frame of a sonnet. But the hot wave streams over these breathing-spaces, and again the mood is that of Rubens and of Jordaens, those mighty revellers.

But naturalistic art is pictorial, not poetic. And it is the great defect of this book that it was written by an inspired painter only, not yet by a poet. The words are coloured, but they are not free; they do not yet rock themselves in their own rhythm; they do not yet storm along to soar aloft with the inspiration; they are wild horses regularly trotting along in the shafts of the Alexandrine. There is a disparity between the inner intractability and the external regularity of these poems. The ore has not yet been molten long enough in the crucible of life to

burst the hereditary mould. You feel that the avidity of life which is the substance of the work has really been seen 'à travers un tempérament,' that here a strong personality is in revolt against all tradition, a strong personality whose ponderous onslaught was bound to strike terror into the cautious and the short-sighted. But the strength and the art are not yet emancipated. Verhaeren is already a passionate onlooker, but he is still only an onlooker, one who stands without and not within the vortex, who watches everything with inspired sympathy, but who has not yet experienced it. This land of Flanders has not yet become a part of the poet's sensibility ; the new point of view and the new form for it are not yet achieved ; there is yet wanting that final smelting of the artistic excitement which is bound to burst all bonds and restrictions, to flame along in its own free feeling in an enraptured intoxication.

THE MONKS

Moines venus vers nous des horizons gothiques,
Mais dont l'âme, mais dont l'esprit meurt de demain . . .
Mes vers vous bâtiront de mystiques autels.
É. V., 'Aux Moines.'

RUBENS, that lavish reveller, is the genius of the Flemish zest in living; but zest in living is only the temperament and not the soul of Flanders. Before him there were the earnest masters of the cloisters, the primitives, the van Eycks, Memling, Gerhard David, Roger van der Weyden; and after them came Rembrandt, the meditative visionary, the restless seeker after new values. Belgium is something else beside the merry land of kermesses; the healthy, sensual people are not the soul of Flanders. Glaring lights cast strong shadows. All vitality that is strongly conscious of itself produces its counterpart, seclusion and asceticism; it is just the healthiest, the elemental races—the Russians of to-day for instance—who among their strong have the weak, among their gluttons of life those who avert their faces from it, among those who assent some who deny. By the side of the ambitious, teeming Belgium we have spoken of, there is a sequestered Belgium which is falling into ruins. Art exclusively in Rubens's sense could take no account of all those solitary cities, Bruges, Ypres,

Dixmude, through whose noiseless streets the monks hasten like flocks of ravens in long processions, in whose canals the dumb white shadows of gliding nuns are mirrored. There, mid life's raging river, are broad islands of dream where men find refuge from realities. Even in the great Belgian cities there are such sequestered haunts of silence, the *béguinages*, those little towns in the town, whither ageing men and women have retired, renouncing the world for the peace of the cloister. Quite as much as the passion of life, the Roman Catholic faith and monkish renunciation are nowhere so deeply and firmly rooted as in this Belgium, where sensual pleasure is so noisy in its excess. Here again an extreme of contrasts is revealed: frowning in the face of the materialistic view of life stands the spiritual view. While the masses in the exuberance of their health and strength proclaim life aloud and pounce on its eternal pleasures, aside and cut off from them stand another, far lesser company to whom life is only a waiting for death, whose silence is as persistent as the exultation of the others. Everywhere here austere faith has its black roots in the vigorous, fruitful soil. For religious feeling always remains alive among a people that has once, although centuries may have passed since, fought with every fibre of its being for its faith. This is a subterranean Belgium that works in secret and that easily escapes the cursory glance, for

it lives in shadows and silence. From this silence, however, from this averted earnestness, Belgian art has derived that mystical nourishment which has lent its baffling strength to the works of Maeterlinck, the pictures of Fernand Khnopff and Georges Minne. Verhaeren, too, did not turn aside from this sombre region. He, as the painter of Belgian life, saw these shadows of a vanishing past, and, in 1886, added to his first book *Les Flamandes* a second, *Les Moines*. It almost seems as though he had first of all been obliged to exhaust both the historical styles of his native land before he could reach his own, the modern style. For this book is essentially a throw-back, a confession of faith in Gothic art.

Monks are for Verhaeren heroic symbols of mighty periods in the past. In his boyhood he was familiar with their grave aspect. Near the cheerful house where his youth was passed, there was at Bornhem a Bernhardine monastery, whither the boy had often accompanied his father to confession, and in whose cold corridors he had often waited in astonishment and with a child's timidity, listening to the majestic chant of the liturgy married to the organ's earnest notes. And here, one day of days, he received, with a thrill of pious terror, his first communion. Since that day the monks had been to him, as he trod the beaten track of custom, beings in a strange world apart, the incarnation of the beautiful

and the supersensual, the unearthly on his child's earth. And when, in the course of years, he sought to create in verse a vision of Flanders in all her luminous and burning colours, he could not forgo this mysterious chiaroscuro, this earnest tone. For three weeks he withdrew to the hospitable monastery of Forges, near Chimay, taking part in all the ceremonies and rites of the monks, who, in the hope of winning a priest, afforded him full insight into their life. But Verhaeren's attitude towards Roman Catholicism was by this time anything but religious, it was rather an æsthetic and poetic admiration for the noble romanticism of the ceremonial, a moral piety for the things of the past. He remained three weeks. Then he fled, oppressed by the nightmare of the ponderous walls, and, as a souvenir for himself, chiselled the image of the monastery in verse.

This book too, no doubt, had no other aim than to be pictorial, descriptive. In rounded sonnets, as though etched by Rembrandt's needle, he fixed the chiaroscuro of the cloister's corridors, the hours of prayer, the earnest meetings of the monks, the silence in the intervals of the liturgy. The evenings over the landscape were described, in a ritual language, with the images of faith : the sun as it sets in crimson flaming like the wine in the chalice ; steeples like luminous crosses in a silent sky ; the rustling corn bowing when the bell rings to evensong.

The poetry of devotion and repose was here revived: the harmony of the organ; the beauty of corridors garlanded with ivy; the touching idyll of the lonely cemetery; the peaceful dying of the prior; the visiting of the sick, and the comfort it brings. Nothing was allowed in the deep light of the colours, in the grave repose of the theme, save what could be fitted into the strictly religious frame of the picture.

But here the pictorial method proved to be insufficient for the poetic effect. The problem of religious feeling is too close to the heart to be reached by outward, even by plastic manifestations. A thing which is so eminently hostile to the sensuous, nay, which is the very symbol of all that is contrary to sensuousness, cannot be reached by a picturesque appeal to the senses; the description of an intellectual problem must cease to be descriptive and become psychology. And so, thus early in his career, Verhaeren is forced away from the picturesque. First, however, he attempts the plastic method: he gives us sombre statues of monks; but even as statues they are only types of an inner life, symbols of the ways to God. Verhaeren develops in his monks the difference of their characters, which are still effective even under the soutane; and by his delicate characterisation he shows the manifold possibilities of religious feeling. The feudal monk, a noble of ancient lineage, would make a conquest of God, as once his ancestors

conquered castle and forest lands with spur and sword. The *moine flambeau*, he that is burning with fervour, would possess Him with his passion like a woman. The savage monk, he that has come from the heart of a forest, can only comprehend Him in heathen wise, only fear Him as the wielder of thunder and lightning, while the gentle monk, he that loves the Virgin with a troubadour's timid tenderness, flees from the fear of Him. One monk would fathom Him by the learning of books and by logic ; another does not understand Him, cannot lay hold on Him, and yet finds Him everywhere, in all things, in all he experiences. Thus all the characters of life, the harshest contrasts, are jostled together, quelled only by the monastery rules. But they are only in juxtaposition, just as the painter loves all his colours and things equally, just as he places things in juxtaposition, without estimating them according to their value. So far there is nothing that binds them together inwardly, there is no conflict of forces, no great idea. Neither are the verses as yet free; they too have the effect of being bound by the strict discipline of the monks. 'Il s'environne d'une sorte de froide lumière parnassienne qui en fait une œuvre plus anonyme, malgré la marque du poète poinçonnée à maintes places sur le métal poli,'[1] says Albert Mockel, the most subtle of æsthetic critics, of the book. Verhaeren must himself

[1] Albert Mockel, *Émile Verhaeren.*

have felt this insufficiency, for, conscious of not having solved his problems in terms of poetry, he has remoulded both aspects of the country, renewed both books in another form after many years: *Les Moines* in the tragedy *Le Cloître*, *Les Flamandes* in the great pentalogy *Toute la Flandre*.

Les Moines was the last of Verhaeren's descriptive books, the last in which he stood on the outer side of things contemplating them dispassionately. But already here there is too much temperament in him to allow him to look at things as altogether unconnected and undisciplined; the joy of magnifying and intensifying by feeling already stirs in him. At the end of the book he no longer sees the monks as isolated individuals, but gathers them all together in a great synthesis in his finale. Behind them the poet sees order, a secret law, a great force of life. They, these hermits who have renounced, who are scattered over the world in a thousand monasteries, are to the poet the last remnants of a great departed beauty, and they are so much the more grandiose as they have lost all feeling for our own time. They are the last ruins of moribund Christianity in a new world, projecting, in tragic loneliness, into our own days. 'Seuls vous survivez grands au monde chrétien mort!'[1] he hails them in admiration, for they have built the great House of God, and for many generations sacrificed

[1] 'Aux Moines.'

their blood for the Host eternally white. In admiration he hails them. Not in faith and love, but in admiration for their fearless energy, and above all because they go on fighting undaunted for something that is dead and lost; because their beauty serves none other than itself; because they project into our own time like the ancient belfries of the land, which no longer call to prayer. In a land where everything else serves a purpose, pleasure and gold, they stand lonely; and they die without a cry and without a moan, fighting against an invisible enemy, they, the last defenders of beauty. For at that time, at that early stage of his career, beauty for Verhaeren was still identical with the past, because he had not yet discovered beauty for himself in the new things; in the monks he celebrates the last romanticists, because he had not yet found poetry in the things of reality, not yet found the new romance, the heroism of the working-day. He loves the monks as great dreamers, as the *chercheurs de chimères sublimes*, but he cannot help them, cannot defend what they possess, for behind them already stand their heirs. These heirs are the poets—a curious echo of David Strauss's idea about religion—who will have to be, what religion with its faithful was to the past, the guardians and eternal promoters of beauty. They it will be—here rings strangely the deepest intention of Verhaeren's later work—who will wave their new faith over the world like a banner, they,

'les poètes venus trop tard pour être prêtres,'[1] who shall be the priests of a new fervour. All religions, all dogmas, are brittle and transitory, Christ dies as Pan dies; and even this poetic faith, the last and highest conquest of the mind, must in its time pass away.

> Car il ne reste rien que l'art sur cette terre
> Pour tenter un cerveau puissant et solitaire
> Et le griser de rouge et tonique liqueur.

In this great hymn to the future Verhaeren first turns away from the past and seeks the path to the future. For the poetic idea is here understood with new and greater feelings than in the beginning of his career. Poetry is for Verhaeren a confession not only as applied to an individual in Goethe's phrase, but in a religious sense as well: as the highest moral confession.

Much as these two books are marked by the effort to describe Flanders as it actually is, stronger than this effort is the yearning at the heart of them to escape from the present to the past. Every temperament exceeds reality. Flanders was here described in the sense of an ideal; but the ideal in both cases was projected on the past. Beauty young Verhaeren had sought in the monks, the symbols of the past; strength and the fire of life he had sought in the old Flemish masters. He still needed the costume of the past to discover the heroic and the beautiful in the present, just like many of our

[1] 'Aux Moines.'

poets, who, when they would paint strong men, must perforce place their dramas in the Florentine renaissance, and who, if they would fashion beauty, deck their characters with Greek costumes. To find strength and beauty, or in one word poetry, in the real things that surround us, is here still denied to Verhaeren; and therefore he has disowned his second book as well as his first. In the distance between the old and the new works the long road may be seen, and seen with pride, which leads from the traditional poet to the truly contemporary poet.

Though not yet divided with a master hand, though not yet in the light of reality, the inner contrast of the country, the conflict between body and soul, between the joy of life and the longing for death, between pleasure and renunciation, the alternative between 'yes' and 'no,' was yet already contained in the contrast of these two books. And in a really emotional poet this contrast could not remain one that was purely external; it was bound to condense to an inner problem, to a personal decision between past and present. Two conceptions of the world, both inherited and in the blood, have here attained consciousness in one man; and though in life they may act independently in juxtaposition, in the individual the conflict must be fought out, the victory of the one or the other must be decided by force, or else by something higher, by an internal reconciliation. This conflict for a conception of

the world pierces through the constant contrast between the acceptance and the denial of life in the poet, a conflict that for ten long years undermined his artistic and human experiences with terrific crises, and brought him to the verge of annihilation. The hostility which divides his country into two camps seems to have taken refuge in his soul to fight it out in a desperate and mortal duel: past and future seem to be fighting for a new synthesis. But only from such crises, from such pitiless struggles with the forces of one's own soul, do the vast conceptions of the universe and their new creative reconciliation grow.

THE BREAK-DOWN

Nous sommes tous des Christs qui embrassons nos croix.
É. V., 'La Joie.'

EVERY feeling, every sensation is, in the last instance, the transformation of pain. Everything that in vibration or by contact touches the epithelium affects it as pain. As pain, which then, by the secret chemistry of the nerves, transmitted from centre to centre, is transformed into impressions, colours, sounds, and conceptions. The poet, whose last secret really is that he is more sensitive than others, that he purifies these pains of contact into feeling with a still more delicate filter, must have finer nerves than anybody else. Where others only receive a vague impression, he must have a clear perception, to which his feeling must respond, and the value of which he must be able to estimate. In Verhaeren's very first books a particular kind of reaction to every incitement was perceptible. His feeling really responds only to strong, intensive, sharp irritation; its delicacy was not abnormal, only the energy of the reaction was remarkable. His first artistic incitement, however, that of Flemish landscapes, was only one of the retina, glaring colours, pictorial charm;

only in *Les Moines* had for the first time more delicate psychic shades been crystallised. In the meantime a transformation had taken place in his exterior life. Verhaeren had turned aside from the contemplation of Nature to concentrate his strength on the cultivation of his mind. He had travelled extensively, had been in Paris and London, in Spain and Germany; with impetuous haste he had assimilated all great ideas, all new phases, all the manifold theories of existence. Without a pause, incessantly, experiences assail him and tire him out. A thousand impressions accost him, each demanding an answer; great, sombre cities discharge their electric fire upon him, and fill his nerves with leaping flame. The sky above him is obscured by the clouds of cities; in London he wanders about as though wildered in a forest. This grey, misty city, that seems as though it were built of steel, casts its whole melancholy over the soul of him who lives there in loneliness, ignorant of the language, and who is so much the more lonely, as all these manifestations of the new life in great cities are still unintelligible to him. He is still unable to capture the poetry that is in them, and so they leap at him and penetrate him with a confused, unintelligible pain. And in this novel atmosphere the intense refinement of his nerves proceeds at such a pace that already the slightest contact with the outer world produces a quivering reaction. Every noise, every colour, every thought

presses in upon him as though with sharp needles ; his healthy sensibility becomes hypertrophied ; that fineness of hearing, of which one is conscious, say in sea-sickness, which perceives every noise, even the slightest sound, as though it were the blow of a hammer, undermines his whole organism ; every rapidly-passing smell corrodes him like an acid ; every ray of light pricks him like a red-hot needle. The process is aggravated by a purely physical illness, which corresponds to his psychic ailment. Just at that time Verhaeren was attacked by a nervous affection of the stomach, one of those repercussions of the psychic on the physical system in which it is hard to say whether the ailing stomach causes the neurasthenic condition, or the weakness of the nerves the stagnation of the digestive functions. Both ailments are inwardly co-ordinated, both are a rejection of the outer impression, an impotent refusal of the chemical conversion. Just as the stomach feels all food as pain, as a foreign body, so the ear repels every sound as an intrusion, so the eye rejects every impression as pain. This nervous rejection of the outer world was already then, in Verhaeren's life, pathological. The bell on the door had to be removed, because it shocked his nerves ; those who lived in the house had to wear felt slippers instead of shoes ; the windows were closed to the noise of the street. These years in Verhaeren's life are the lowest depth, the crisis of his vitality. It is in such periods of

depression that invalids shut themselves off from the world, from their fellow-men, from the light of day, from the din of existence, from books, from all contact with the outer world, because they instinctively feel that everything can be a renewal of their pain, and nothing an enrichment of their life. They seek to soften the world, to tone its colours down; they bury themselves in the monotony of solitude. This 'soudaine lassitude'[1] then impinges on to the moral nature; the will, losing the sense of life, is paralysed; all standards of value collapse; ideals founder in the most frightful Nihilism. The earth becomes a chaos, the sky an empty space; everything is reduced to nothingness, to an absolute negation. Such crises in the life of a poet are almost always sterile. And it is therefore of incalculable value that here a poet should have observed himself and given us a clear picture of himself in this state, that, without fear of the ugliness, the confusion of his ego, he should have described, in terms of art, the history of a psychic crisis. In Verhaeren's trilogy, *Les Soirs*, *Les Débâcles*, *Les Flambeaux Noirs*, we have a document that must be priceless to pathologists as to psychologists. For here a deep-seated will to extract the last consequence from every phase of life has reproduced the stadium of a mental illness right to the verge of madness; here a poet has with the persistence of a physician pur-

[1] 'L'Heure Mauvaise' (*Au Bord de la Route*).

sued the symptoms of his suffering through every stage of lacerating pain, and immortalised in poems the process of the inflammation of his nerves.

The landscape of this book is no longer that of his native province; indeed, it can hardly be called one of earth. It is a grandiose landscape of dreams, horizons as though on some other planet, as though in one of those worlds which have cooled into moons, where the warmth of the earth has died out and an icy calm chills the vast far-seen spaces deserted of man. Already in the book of the monks, Rubens's merry landscape had been clouded over; and in the next, *Au Bord de la Route*, the grey hand of a cloud had eclipsed the sun. But here all the colours of life are burnt out, not a star shines down from this steel-grey metallic sky; only a cruel, freezing moon glides across it from time to time like a sardonic smile. These are books of pallid nights, with the immense wings of clouds closing the sky, over a narrowed world, in which the hours cling to things like heavy and clammy chains. They are works filled with a glacial cold. 'Il gèle . . .'[1] one poem begins, and this shuddering tone pierces like the howling of dogs ever and ever again over an illimitable plain. The sun is dead, dead are the flowers, the trees; the very marshes are frozen in these white midnights:

> Et la crainte saisit d'un immortel hiver
> Et d'un grand Dieu soudain, glacial et splendide.[2]

[1] 'La Barque' (*Au Bord de la Route*). [2] 'Le Gel' (*Les Soirs*).

In his fever the poet is for ever dreaming of this cold, as though in a secret yearning for its cooling breath. No one speaks to him, only the winds howl senselessly through the streets like dogs round a house. Often dreams come, but they are *fleurs du mal*; they dart out of the ice burning, yellow, poisonous. More and more monotonous grow the days, more and more fearful; they fall down like drops, heavy and black.

Mes jours toujours plus lourds s'en vont roulant leur cours![1]

In thought and sound these verses express all the frightful horror of this desolation. Impotently the ticking of the clock hammers this endless void, and measures a barren time. Darker and darker grows the world, more and more oppressive; the concave mirror of solitude distorts the poet's dreams into frightful grimaces, and spirits whisper evil thoughts in his restless heart.

And like a fog, like a heavy, stifling cloud, fatigue sinks down on his soul. First pleasure in things had died, and then the very will to pleasure. The soul craves nothing now. The nerves have withdrawn their antennæ from the outer world; they are afraid of every impression; they are spent. Whatever chances to drift against them no longer becomes colour, sound, impression; the senses are too feeble for the chemical conversion of impressions: and so everything remains at the stage of pain, a dull, gnawing

[1] 'L'Heure Mauvaise' (*Au Bord de la Route*).

pain. Feeling, which the nerves are now powerless to feed, starves; desire is sunk in sleep. Autumn has come; all the flowers have withered; and winter comes apace.

> Il fait novembre en mon âme.
> Et c'est le vent du nord qui clame
> Comme une bête dans mon âme.[1]

Slowly, but irresistible as a swelling tide, emerges an evil thought: the idea of the senselessness of life, the thought of death. As the last of yearnings soars up the prayer:

> Mourir! comme des fleurs trop énormes, mourir![2]

For the poet's whole body is, as it were, sore from this contact with the outer world, from these little gnawing pains. Not a single great feeling can stand erect: everything is eaten away by this little, gnawing, twitching pain. But now the man in his torture springs up, as a beast, tormented by the stings of insects, tears its chains asunder and rushes madly and blindly along. The patient would fain flee from his bed of torture, but he cannot retrace his steps. No man can 'se recommencer enfant, avec calcul.'[3] Travels, dreams, do nothing but deaden the pain; and then the torment of the awakening sets in again with redoubled strength. Only one way is open: the road which leads forward, the road to annihilation. Out of a thousand petty pains, the will longs for one single pain that shall

[1] 'Vers' (*Au Bord de la Route*).
[2] 'Mourir' (*Les Soirs*).
[3] 'S'amoindrir' (*Les Débâcles*).

end all: the body that is being burnt piecemeal cries for the lightning. The sick man desires—as fever-patients will tear their wounds open—to make this pain, which tortures without destroying, so great and murderous that it will kill outright: to save his pride, he would fain be himself the cause of his destruction. Pain, he says to himself, shall not continue to be a series of pin-pricks; he refuses to 'pourrir, immensément emmailloté d'ennui'; [1] he asks to be destroyed by a vast, fiery, savage pain; he demands a beautiful and tragic death. *The will to experience becomes here the will to suffer pain* and even death. He will be glad to suffer any torture, but not this one low little thing; he can no longer endure to feel himself so contemptible, so wretched.

> N'entendre plus se taire, en sa maison d'ébène,
> Qu'un silence total dont auraient peur les morts.[2]

And with a flagellant's pleasure the patient nurses this fire of fever, till it flames up in a bright blaze. The deepest secret of Verhaeren's art was from the first his joy in intemperance, the strength of his exaggeration. And so, too, he snatches up this pain, this neurasthenia to a wonderful, fiery, and grandiose ecstasy. A cry, a pleasure breaks out of this idea of liberation. For the first time the word 'joy' blazes again in the cry:

> Le joie enfin me vient, de souffrir par moi-même,
> Parce que je le veux.[3]

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[1] 'Si Morne' (*Les Debâcles*). [2] 'Le Roc' (*Les Flambeaux Noirs*).
[3] 'Insatiablement' (*Les Soirs*).

True, only a perverse joy, a sophism, the false triumph over life of the suicide, who believes he has conquered fate when, truth to tell, it has conquered him. But this self-deception is already sublime.

By this sudden interference of the will the physical torture of the nerves becomes a psychic event; the illness of the body encroaches upon the intellect; the neurasthenia becomes a 'déformation morale'; the suffering schism of the poet's ego is of itself subdivided, so to speak, into two elements, one that excites pain and one that suffers pain. The psychic would fain tear itself free from the physical, the soul would fain withdraw from the tortured body:

> Pour s'en aller vers les lointains et se défaire
> De soi et des autres, un jour,
> En un voyage ardent et mol comme l'amour
> Et légendaire ainsi qu'un départ de galère![1]

But the two are relentlessly bound up with each other, no flight is possible, however much disgust drives the poet to rescue at least a part of himself by snatching it into a purer, calmer, and higher state. Never, I believe, has the aversion of a sick man to himself, the will to health of a living man, been more cruel and more grandiose than in this book of a poet's diabolical revolt against himself. His suffering soul is torn into two parts. In a fearful personification the hangman and the condemned criminal wrestle

[1] 'Là-bas' (*Au Bord de la Route*).

for the mastery. 'Se cravacher dans sa pensée et dans son sang!'[1] and finally, in a paroxysm of fury, 'me cracher moi-même,'[2] these are the horribly shrilling cries of self-hatred and self-disgust. With all the strings of her whipped strength the soul tears to free herself from the rotting and tormented body, and her deepest torture is that this separation is impossible. In this distraction flickers already the first flame of madness.

Never—if we except Dostoieffsky—has a poet's scalpel probed the wound of his ego so cruelly and so deeply, never has it gone so dangerously near to the nerve of life. And never perhaps, except in Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo!* has a poet stepped so close to the edge of the precipice that juts above the abyss of existence, with so clear a consciousness of its vicinity, to feast on the feeling of dizziness and on the danger of death. The fire in Verhaeren's nerves has slowly inflamed his brain. But the other being, the poet in him, had remained watchful, observing the eye of madness slowly, inevitably, and as though magnetically attracted, coming nearer and nearer. 'L'absurdité grandit en moi comme une fleur fatale.'[3] In gentle fear, but at the same time with a secret voluptuous pleasure, he felt the dreaded thing approaching. For long already he had been conscious that this rending of

[1] 'Vers le Cloître' (*Les Debâcles*).
[2] 'Un Soir' (*Au Bord de la Route*). [3] 'Fleur Fatale' (*Les Débâcles*).

himself had hunted his thinking from the circle of clarity. And in one grandiose poem, in which he sees the corpse of his reason floating down the grey Thames, the sick man describes that tragic foundering :

Elle est morte de trop savoir,
De trop vouloir sculpter la cause,
. . . . .
Elle est morte, atrocement,
D'un savant empoisonnement,
Elle est morte aussi d'un délire
Vers un absurde et rouge empire.[1]

But no fear takes him at this thought. Verhaeren is a poet who loves paroxysm. And just as in his physical illness he had called out in the deepest joy for the intoxication of illness, for its exasperation, for death, so now his psychic illness demands its intoxication, the dissolution of all order, its most glorious foundering : madness. Here, too, the pleasure in the quest of pain is intensified to the highest superlative, to a voluptuous joy in self-destruction. And as sick men amid their torments scream of a sudden for death, this tortured man screams in grim yearning for madness :

Aurai-je enfin l'atroce joie
De voir, nerfs par nerfs, comme une proie,
La démence attaquer mon cerveau ? [2]

He has measured all the deeps of the spirit, but all the words of religion and science, all the elixirs

[1] 'La Morte' (*Les Flambeaux Noirs*).
[2] 'Le Roc' (*Ibid.*).

of life, have been powerless to save him from this torment. He knows all sensations, and there was no greatness in any of them; all have goaded him, none have exalted him or raised him above himself. And now his heart yearns ardently for this last sensation of all. He is tired of waiting for it, he will go out to meet it: 'Je veux marcher vers la folie et ses soleils.'[1] He hails madness as though it were a saint, as though it were his saviour; he forces himself to 'croire à la démence ainsi qu'en une foi.'[2] It is a magnificent picture reminding one of the legend of Hercules, who, tortured by the fiery robe of Nessus, hurls himself on the pyre to be consumed by one great flame instead of being wretchedly burnt to death by a thousand slow and petty torments.

Here the highest state of despair is reached; the black banner of death and the red one of madness are furled together. With unprecedented logic Verhaeren, despairing of an interpretation of life, has exalted senselessness as the sense of the universe. But it is just in this complete inversion that victory already lies. Johannes Schlaf, in his masterly study, has with great eloquence demonstrated that it is just at the moment when the sick man cries out like one being crucified, 'Je suis l'immensément perdu,'[3] just when he feels he is being drawn into the bosom of the infinite, that he is redeemed

[1] 'Fleur Fatale' (*Les Débâcles*). [2] 'Le Roc' (*Les Flambeaux Noirs*). [3] 'Les Nombres' (*Ibid.*).

and delivered. Just this idea, which here had whipped the little pain to the verge of madness,

> À chaque heure, violenter sa maladie ;
> L'aimer, et la maudire,[1]

is already the deepest leitmotiv of Verhaeren's work, the key to unlock the gates of it. For the idea is nothing else than the idea of his life, to master all resistance by a boundless love, ' aimer le sort jusqu'en ses rages ' ; [2] never to shun a thing, but to take everything and enhance it till it becomes creative, ecstatic pleasure ; to welcome every suffering with fresh readiness. Even this cry for madness, no doubt the extreme document of human despair, is an immense yearning for clearness ; in this tortured disgust with illness cries a joy in life perhaps else unknown in our days ; and the whole conflict, which seems to be a flight from life, is in the last instance an immense heroism for which there is no name. Nietzsche's great saying is here fulfilled : ' For a dionysiac task a hammer's hardness, *the pleasure in destruction itself*, is most decidedly one of the preliminary conditions.' [3] And what at this period of Verhaeren's work appears still to be negative is in the higher sense a preparation for the positive, for the decisive consummation of the later books.

For that reason this crisis and the shaping of it in verse remain an imperishable monument

[1] ' Celui de la Fatigue ' (*Les Apparus dans mes Chemins*).
[2] ' La Joie ' (*Les Visages de la Vie*).
[3] *Ecce Homo !*

of our contemporary literature, for it is at the same time an eternal monument to the conquest of human suffering by the power of art. Verhaeren's crisis—his exposition, for the sake of the value of life, of his inward struggle—has gone deeper than that of any other poet of our time. To this very day the sufferings of that time are graven, as though by iron wedges, in the furrows of his lofty brow; the recovery of his health and his subsequent robustness have been powerless to efface them. This crisis was a fire without parallel, a flame of passion. Not a single acquisition from the earlier days was rescued from it. Verhaeren's whole former relation to the world has broken down: his Catholic faith, his religion, his feeling for his native province, for the world, for life itself, all is destroyed. And when he builds up his work now, it must perforce be an entirely different one, with a different artistic expression, with different feelings, different knowledge, and different harmonies. This tempest has changed the landscape of his soul, where once the peace of a modest existence had prevailed, into a pathless desert. But this desert with its solitude has space and liberty for the building up of a new, a richer, an infinitely nobler world.

FLIGHT INTO THE WORLD

On boit sa soif, on mange sa faim.—É. V., 'L'Amour.'

In this crisis the negation was driven to the last possible limits. The sick man had denied not only the outer world, but himself as well. Nothing had remained but vexation, disgust, and torment.

La vie en lui ne se prouvait
Que par l'horreur qu'il en avait.[1]

He had arrived at the last possibility, at that possibility which means destruction or transformation. The at first purely physical pain of the supersensitive organs of the senses had become a moral depression; the depression had become psychic suffering; and this again had gradually turned in a grandiose progression not only to pain in the individual thing but to suffering in the all: to *cosmic pain*. For Him, however, who in His loneliness took the suffering of the whole world upon His shoulders, who was strong enough to bear it for all the centuries, humanity has invented the symbol of 'God.' He who is born of earth and lives to die must perforce break down under so gigantic a burden. Into the last corner

[1] 'Un Soir' (*Au Bord de la Route*).

of his ego revengeful life had here driven the man who denied it, had driven him to the point where now he stood shivering before the abyss in his own breast, face to face with death and madness. The physical and poetic organism of Verhaeren was overheated to the most dangerous and extreme degree. This fever-heat—that of a flagellant—had brought his blood to the boiling-point; it was filling the chamber of his breast with pictures of such overwhelming horror that the explosion of self-destruction could only be prevented by opening the valve.

There were only two means of flight from this destruction: flight into the past—or flight into a new world. Many, Verlaine for instance, had in such catastrophes, wherein the whole structure of their lives tumbled to the ground, fled into the cathedrals of Catholicism rather than stand in solitude under the threatening sky. Verhaeren, however, though an inspired faith is one of the most living sources of his poetical power, was more afraid of the past than of the Unknown. *He freed himself from the immense pressure upon him by fleeing into the world.* He who in his pride had conceived the whole process of the world as a personal affair, he who had tried to solve the eternal discord, the undying 'yes' and 'no' of life in his own lonely self, now rushes into the very midst of things and involves himself in their process. He who previously had felt everything only subjectively, only in isolation, now objectifies

himself; he who previously had shut himself off from reality, now lets his veins pulse in harmony with the breathing organism of life. He relinquishes his attitude of pride; he surrenders himself; lavishes himself joyously on everything; exchanges the pride of being alone for the immense pleasure of being everywhere. *He no longer looks at all things in himself, but at himself in all things.* But the poet in him frees himself, quite in Goethe's sense, by symbols. Verhaeren drives his superabundance out of himself into the whole world, just as Christ in the legend drove the devils out of the madman into the swine. The heat, the fever of his feeling—which, concentrated in his too narrow chest, were near bursting it—now animate with their fire the whole world around him, which of old had been to him congealed with ice. All the evil powers, which had slunk around him in the trappings of nightmares, he now transforms to shapes of life. He hammers away at them and shapes them anew; he is himself the smith of that noble poem of his, the smith of whom he says:

Dans son brasier, il a jeté
Les cris d'opiniâtreté,
La rage sourde et séculaire;
Dans son brasier d'or exalté,
Maître de soi, il a jeté
Révoltes, deuils, violences, colères,
Pour leur donner la trempe et la clarté
Du fer et de l'éclair. [1]

[1] 'Le Forgeron' (*Les Villages Illusoires*).

He objectifies his personality in the work of art, hammering out of the cold blocks, that weighed upon him with the weight of iron, monuments and statues of pain. All the feelings which of old weighed down upon him like dull fog, formless and prisoned in dream like nightmares, now become clear statues, symbols in stone of his soul's experiences. The poet has torn his fear, his burning, moaning, horrible fear, out of himself, and poured it into his bell-ringer, who is consumed in his blazing belfry. He has turned the monotony of his days to music in his poem of the rain; his mad fight against the elements, which in the end break his strength, he has shaped into the image of the ferryman struggling against the current that shatters his oars one after the other. His cruel probing of his own pain he has visualised in the idea of his fishermen, who with their nets all in holes go on fishing up nothing but suffering on suffering out of the sombre stream; his evil and red lusts he has spiritualised in his *Aventurier*, in the adventurer who returns home from a far land to celebrate his wedding feast with his dead love. Here his feelings are shaped no longer in moods, in the fluid material of dreams, but in the infinitely mobile form of human beings. Here there is symbolism in the highest sense, in Goethe's sense of liberation. For every feeling that has achieved artistic shape is as it were conjured away out of the breast. And thus the too heavy pressure slowly disappears from the poet's being,

and the morbid fever from his work. Now and now only does he recognise the suicidal cowardice behind the visor of the pride that forced him to fly from the world, now and now only does he understand that fatal egoism which had taken refuge beyond the pale of the world :

> J'ai été lâche et je me suis enfui
> Du monde, en mon orgueil futile.

This confession is the last liberating word of the crisis.

Now his despair—a despair like that of Faust—is overcome. The mood of Easter morning begins to sound the exulting cry, 'Earth has me again!'[2] with the anthems of the resurrection. Verhaeren has described this deliverance, this ascent from illness to health, from the most despairing 'no' to the most exultant 'yes,' in many symbols, most beautifully in that magnificent poem wherein St. George the dragon-slayer bows down to him with his shining lance ; and again in that other poem in which the four gentle sisters approach him and announce his deliverance :

> L'une est le bleu pardon, l'autre la bonté blanche,
> La troisième l'amour pensif, la dernière le don
> D'être, même pour les méchants, le sacrifice.[3]

Goodness and love call to him now from where of old there were only hatred and despair. And in their approach already he feels the hope of recovery, the hope of a natural, artistic strength.

[1] 'Saint Georges' (*Les Apparus dans mes Chemins*).
[2] Goethe's *Faust*, l. 784.
[3] 'Les Saintes' (*Les Apparus dans mes Chemins*).

Et quand elles auront, dans ma maison,
Mis de l'ordre à mes torts, plié tous mes remords
Et refermé, sur mes péchés, toute cloison,
En leur pays d'or immobile, où le bonheur
Descend, sur des rives de fleurs entr'accordées,
Elles dresseront les hautes idées,
En sainte-table, pour mon cœur.[1]

This feeling of recovery grows more and more secure, more and more the mist parts before the approaching sun of health. Now the poet knows that he has been wandering in the dark galleries of mines, that he has been hammering a labyrinth through the hard rock of hatred instead of walking the same path as his fellow-men in the light. And at last, bright and exultant, high above the shy voices of hope and prayer, the sudden triumph of certainty rings out. For the first time Verhaeren finds the form of the poem of the future—the dithyramb. Where of old, confused and lonely, *le carillon noir* of pain sounded, now all the strings of the heart vibrate and sing.

Sonnez toutes mes voix d'espoir !
Sonnez en moi ; sonnez, sous les rameaux,
En des routes claires et du soleil ![2]

And now the path proceeds in light 'vers les claires métamorphoses.'[3]

This flight into the world was the great liberation. Not only has the body grown strong again and rejoices in the wandering and the way, but the soul too has become cheerful, the will has

[1] 'Les Saintes' (*Les Apparus dans mes Chemins*).
[2] 'Saint Georges' (*Ibid*). [3] 'Le Forgeron' (*Les Villages Illusoires*).

grown new wings that are stronger than the old, and the poet's art is filled with a fresh blood red with life. The deliverance is perceptible even in Verhaeren's verse, which with its delicate nerves reproduces all the phases of his soul. For his poetry, which at first in the indifference of its picturesque description preserved the cold form of the Alexandrine, and then, in the grim monotony of the crisis, tried to represent the void waste of feeling by a terrifying, gruesomely beautiful uniformity of rhythm, this poem of a sudden, as though out of a dream, starts into life, awakens like an animal from sleep, rears, prances, curvets; imitates all movements, threatens, exults, falls into ecstasy: in other words, all of a sudden, and independently of all influences and theories, he has won his way to the *vers libre*, free verse. Just as the poet no longer shuts the world up in himself, but bestows himself on the world, the poem too no longer seeks to lock the world up obstinately in its four-cornered prison, but surrenders itself to every feeling, every rhythm, every melody; it adapts itself, distends; with its foaming voluptuous joy it can fold in its embrace the illimitable length and breadth of cities, can contract to pick up the loveliness of one fallen blossom, can imitate the thundering voice of the street, the hammering of machines, and the whispering of lovers in a garden of spring. *The poem can now speak in all the languages of feeling, with all the voices of men; for the tortured,*

moaning cry of an individual has become the voice of the universe.

But together with this new delight the poet feels the debt which he has withheld from his age. He beholds the lost years in which he lived only for himself, for his own little feeling, instead of listening to the voice of his time. With a remarkable concordance of genius Verhaeren's work here expresses what Dehmel—in the same year perhaps—fashioned with such grandeur in 'The Mountain Psalm,' the poem in which, looking down from the heights of solitude to the cities in their pall of smoke, he cries in ecstasy :

Was weinst du, Sturm ?—Hinab, Erinnerungen !
dort pulst im Dunst der Weltstadt zitternd Herz !
Es grollt ein Schrei von Millionen Zungen
nach Glück und Frieden : Wurm, was will dein Schmerz !
Nicht sickert einsam mehr von Brust zu Brüsten,
wie einst die Sehnsucht, als ein stiller Quell ;
heut stöhnt ein *Volk* nach Klarheit, wild und gell,
und du schwelgst noch in Wehmutslüsten ?

Siehst du den Qualm mit dicken Fäusten drohn
dort überm Wald der Schlote und der Essen ?
Auf deine Reinheitsträume fällt der Hohn
der Arbeit ! fühl's : sie ringt, von Schmutz zerfressen.
Du hast mit deiner Sehnsucht bloss gebuhlt,
in trüber Glut dich selber nur genossen ;
schütte die Kraft aus, die dir zugeflossen,
und du wirst frei vom Druck der Schuld ![1]

[1] 'Why weepest thou, O storm ?—Down, memories ! Yonder in the smoke pulses the great city's trembling heart ! A million grumbling tongues are crying for peace and happiness : worm, what would thy pain ! Yearning no longer trickles lonely from breast to breasts, a quiet source and no more : to-day a *nation* groans, and with wild, shrill

Pour out the power that has flowed in upon thee! Surrender thyself! That too is Verhaeren's ecstatic cry at this hour. Opposites touch. *Supreme solitude is turned to supreme fellowship.* The poet feels that self-surrender is more than self-preservation. All at once he sees behind him the frightful danger of this self-seeking pain.

Et tout à coup je m'apparais celui
Qui s'est, hors de soi-même, enfui
Vers le sauvage appel des forces unanimes.[1]

And he who in days gone by had fled from this appeal into cold solitude, now casts himself ecstatically into the arms of the world, with the deepest yearning

De n'être plus qu'un tourbillon
Qui se disperse au vent mystérieux des choses.[2]

He feels that in order to live to the full all the greatness and beauty of this fiery world, he must multiply himself, be a thousandfold and ten thousandfold what he is. 'Multiplie-toi!' Be manifold. Surrender thyself! For the first time this cry bursts up like a flame. Be manifold!

voices demands clearness—and thou still revellest in the joys of melancholy?

'Seest thou the reek and smoke threatening yonder over the forest of flues and chimneys? Upon thy dreams of purity falls the scorn of labour! Feel it: labour is struggling, eaten up with dirt! Thou hast but wantoned with thy yearning, thou hast but enjoyed thyself in turbid heat; pour out the power that has flowed in upon thee, and thou shalt be free from the burden of guilt!'—'Bergpsalm' (*Aber die Liebe*).

[1] 'La Foule' (*Les Visages de la Vie*).

[2] 'Celui du Savoir' (*Les Apparus dans mes Chemins*).

Multiplie et livre-toi ! Défais
Ton être en des millions d'êtres ;
Et sens l'immensité filtrer et transparaître.[1]

Only from this brotherhood with all things accrue the possibilities of being a modern poet. Only by self-surrender to everything that is could Verhaeren attain to so grandiose a conception of contemporary manifestations, only thus could he become the poet of the democracy of cities, of industrialism, of science, the poet of Europe, the poet of our age. Only such a pantheistic feeling could create this intimate relationship between the world of self and the world surrounding self, the relationship which subsequently ends in an unparalleled identity : only so despairing a ' no ' could be transformed to so enraptured a ' yes,' only one who had fled from the world could possess it with such passion.

[1] ' La Forêt ' (*Les Visages de la Vie*).

PART II

CONSTRUCTIVE FORCES

LES CAMPAGNES HALLUCINÉES—LES VILLAGES ILLUSOIRES—LES VILLES TENTACULAIRES—LES DRAMES

1893-1900

CONTEMPORARY FEELING

J'étais le carrefour où tout se rencontrait.—É. V., 'Le Mont.'

VERHAEREN'S deliverance from the stifling clasp of his crisis was a flight to realities. He saved himself by no longer fixing his gaze rigidly on himself and deeply probing every feeling of joy and torment, but by turning to the world of phenomena and flinging himself on its problems. He has no longer to stand in solitude facing the world; his desire is to multiply himself, to realise himself in everything that is alive, in everything that expresses a will, an idea, a form, anything at all animated. His poetic aim now is, not so much to analyse himself to himself, as to analyse himself in the whole world.

To realities, and particularly to the realities of our day, lyric poets had previously felt themselves alien. It had long been a commonplace to speak of the danger to art of industrialism, of democracy, of this age of machinery which makes our life uniform, kills individuality, and drowns romance in actualities. All these poets have looked upon the new creations, machines, railways, monster cities, the telegraph, the telephone,

all the triumphs of engineering, as a drag on the soaring of poetry. Ruskin preached that workshops should be demolished and chimneys razed to the ground; Tolstoy pointed to primitive man, who produces all his requirements from his own resources independently of any community, and saw in him the moral and æsthetic ideal of the future. In poetry, the past had gradually come to be identified with the poetical. People were enamoured of the glory that was Greece, of mail-coaches and narrow, crooked streets; they were filled with enthusiasm for all foreign cultures, and decried that of our own time as a phase of degeneration. Democracy, levelling all ranks and confining even the poet to the middle-class profession of author, seemed, as a social order, to be the correlation of machinery which, by the constructive skill of workshops, renders all manual dexterity unnecessary. All the poets, who were glad to avail themselves of the practical advantages provided by technical science, who had no objection to covering immense distances in the minimum time, who accepted the comfort of the modern house, the luxury of modern conditions of life, increased pecuniary rewards and social independence, refused obstinately to discover in these advantages a single poetic motive, a single object of inspiration, the least stimulus or ecstasy. Poetry had by degrees come to be something which was the very opposite of whatever is useful; all evolution seemed to these

poets to be, from the point of view of culture, retrogression.

Now it is Verhaeren's great exploit that he effected a transmutation of poetic values. He discovered the sublime in the far-spread serried ranks of democracy; beauty he found not only where it adapts itself to traditional ideas, but also where, still hidden by the cotyledon of the new, it is just beginning to unfold. By rejecting no phenomenon, in so far as an inward sense and a necessity dwelt in it, he infinitely extended the boundaries of the lyric art. He found a fruitful soil in the very places where all other poets despaired of poetic seed. He and he alone, who had for so long been eating his heart out in fierce isolation, feels the strength and fulness of society, the poetical element in the massed strength of great cities and in great inventions. *His deepest longing, his most sublime exploit is the lyric discovery of the new beauty in new things.*

The only way to this feat lay for him through the conviction that beauty does not express anything absolute, but something that changes with circumstances and with men; that beauty, like everything that is subject to evolution, is constantly changing. Yesterday's beauty is not to-day's beauty. Beauty is no more opposed than anything else to that tendency to spiritualisation which is the most characteristic symptom and result of all culture. Physiologists have proved that the physical strength of modern man

is inferior to that of his ancestors, but that his nervous system is more developed, so that strength is more and more concentrated in the intellect. The Hellenic hero was the wrestler, the expression of a body harmoniously developed in every limb, the perfection of strength and skill ; the hero of our time is the thinker, the ideal of intellectual strength and suppleness. And since our only way of estimating the perfection of things is by the ideal of our personal feeling, the form of beauty likewise has been transformed and become intellectual. And even when we seek it in the body, as, for instance, in the ideal woman's figure, we have grown accustomed to seeing perfection not so much in robustness and plumpness as in a noble, slender play of lines which mysteriously expresses the soul. Beauty is turning away more and more from the outer surface, from the physical, to the interior aspects, to the psychic. In proportion as motive forces hide themselves and as harmony becomes less obvious, beauty intellectualises itself. It is becoming for us not so much a beauty of appearance as a beauty of aim. If we are to admire the telegraph or the telephone, we shall not be satisfied with considering the exterior forms, the network of wires, the keys, the receivers ; we shall be impressed rather by the ideal beauty, by the idea of a vibrating spark leaping over countries and whole continents. A machine is not wonderful on account of its rattling, rusty, iron framework, but

by the idea, deep-seated in its body, which is the principle of its magical activity. A modern idea of beauty must be adapted not only to the idea of beauty of the past, but also to that of the future. And the future of æsthetics is a kind of ideology, or, as Renan expresses it, an identity with the sciences. We shall lose the habit of understanding things only by our senses, of seeing their harmony only on their exterior surface, and we shall have to learn how to conceive their intellectual aims, their inner form, their psychic organisation, as beauty.

For these new things are only ugly when they are regarded with the eyes of a past century, when our contemporaries, jealously guarding a reverent over-estimation, valuing the rust and not the gold, despise modern works of art, and pay a thousand times too dear for the indifferent productions of a past age. Only in this state of feeling is it possible to esteem mail-coaches poetical and locomotives ugly ; only thus is it possible for poets, who have not learned to see with emancipated and independent eyes, to assume such a hostile attitude, or at the best an indifferent attitude, to our realities. Let us remember Nietzsche's beautiful words : 'My formula for grandeur in man is *amor fati* : that a man should ask for nothing else, either in the past or in the future, in all eternity. We must not only endure what is necessary, still less conceal it—all idealism is lying in necessity's

face—but we must *love* it.'[1] And in this sense some few in our days have loved what is new, first as a necessity, and then as beauty. A generation ago now, Carlyle was the first to preach the heroism of everyday life, and exhorted the poets of his day not to describe the greatness they found in mouldy chronicles, but to look for it where it was nearest to them, in the realities around them. Constantin Meunier has found the idea of a new sculpture in democracy, Whistler and Monet have discovered in the smoky breath of this age of machinery a new tone of colour which is not less beautiful than Italy's eternal azure and the halcyon sky of Greece. It is only from the vast agglomerations, the immense dimensions of the new world that Walt Whitman has derived the strength and power of his voice. The whole difficulty which thus far has permitted only a few to serve the new beauty in the new things lies in the fact that our age is not yet a period of decided conviction, but only one of transition. The victory of machinery is not yet complete; handiwork still subsists, little towns still flourish, it is still possible to take refuge in an idyll, to find the old beauty in some sequestered corner. Not till the poet is shut off from all flight to inherited ideals will he be forced to change himself into a new man. For the new things have not yet organically developed their beauty. Every new thing on its first appearance

[1] *Ecce Homo!*

is blended with something repellent, brutal, and ugly; it is only gradually that its inherent form shapes itself æsthetically. The first steamers, the first locomotives, the first automobiles, were ugly. But the slender, agile torpedo-boats of to-day, the bright-coloured, noiselessly-gliding automobiles with their hidden mechanism, the great, broad-chested Pacific Railway engines of to-day, are impressive by their outward form alone. Our huge shops, such as those which Messel built in Berlin, display a beauty in iron and glass which is hardly less than that of the cathedrals and palaces of old time. Certain great things, such as the Eiffel Tower, the Forth Bridge, modern men-of-war, furnaces belching flame, the Paris boulevards, have a new beauty beyond anything which past ages had to show. These new things compel a new enhancement of value, on the one hand by the idea that moves them, on the other hand by their democratic grandeur and their vast dimensions—equalled by none but the very greatest works of antiquity. But whatever is beautiful must, sooner or later, be conceived of as poetry. And thus, it is quite sure, Verhaeren has only been one of the first to build bridges from the old to the new time; others will come who will celebrate the new beauties in the new things—gigantic cities, engines, industrialism, democracy, this fiery striving for new standards of greatness—and they will not only be compelled to find the new beauties,

they will also have to establish new laws for this new order, a different morality, a different religion, a different synthesis for this new conditionality. The poetic transmutation of the beautiful is only a first beginning of the poetic transmutation of the feeling of life.

But a poet never finds anything in things save his own temperament. If he is melancholy, the world in his books is void of sense, all lights are extinguished, laughter dies; if he is passionate, all feelings seethe in a fiery froth as though in a cauldron, and foam up in angry happenings. Whereas the real world is manifold, and contains the elixirs of pleasure and pain, confidence and despair, love and hate, only as elements so to speak, the world of great poets is the world of one single feeling. And so Verhaeren too sees all things in their new beauty with the feelings of his own life only, only with energy. In these the fiery years of his prime it is not harmony that he seeks, but energy, power. For him a thing is the more beautiful the more purpose, will, power, energy it contains. And since the whole world of to-day is over-heated with effort and energy; since our great towns are nothing but centres of multiplied energy; since machinery expresses nothing save force tamed and organised; since innumerable crowds are yoked in harmonious action—to him the world is full of beauty. He loves the new age because it does not isolate effort but condenses it, because it is not scattered but con-

centrated for action. And of a sudden everything he sees appears to be filled with soul. All that has will, all that has an aim in view—man, machine, crowd, city, money; all that vibrates, works, hammers, travels, exults; all that propagates itself and is multiplied, all that strives to be creation; all that bears in itself fire, impulse, electricity, feeling—all this rings again in his verse. All that of old had acted upon him as being cold and dead and hostile is now inspired with will and energy, and lives its minute; in this multiple gear there is nothing that is merely dust or useless ornamentation; everything is creation, everything is working its way towards the future. The town, this piled-up Babylon of stones and men, is of a sudden a living being, a vampire sucking the strength of the land; the factories, that had seemed to him nothing but an unsightly mass of masonry, now become the creators of a thousand things, which in their turn create new things out of themselves. All at once Verhaeren is the socialist poet, the poet of the age of machinery, of democracy, and of the European race. And energy fills his poetry too: it is strength let loose, enthusiasm, paroxysm, ecstasy, whatever you like to call it; but always active, glowing, moving strength; never rest, always activity. His poem is no longer declamation, no longer the marmoreal monument of a mood, but a crying aloud, a fight, a convulsive starting, a stooping down and a springing up again; it is a battle

materialised. For him all values have been transmuted. It is just what had repelled him most—London, monster cities, railway stations, Exchanges, which now lure him most of all as poetic problems. The more a thing seems to resist beauty—the more he has first to discover its beauty by fighting it and wrestling with it in torment—with so much the greater ecstasy does he now extol it. The strength which had murderously raged against itself now, in creative ecstasy, breaks into the world. To tear down resistance, to snatch beauty from its most hidden corner, is now for him a tenfold strength and joy of creation. *Verhaeren now creates the poem of the great city in the dionysiac sense;* the hymn to our own time, to Europe; creates ecstasy, renewed and renewed again, in life.

TOWNS ('LES VILLES TENTACULAIRES')

Le siècle et son horreur se condensent en elles
Mais leur âme contient la minute éternelle.
É. V., 'Les Villes.'

When a man just recovered from illness steps for the first time with arms outspread, and as though climbing up from a dungeon, into the light of day, he is filled with a bliss beyond measure by the open air caressing him on all sides, by the orgies of the sunlight, the cataracts of deafening din: with a cry of infinite exultation he takes into himself the symphony of life. And from this first moment of his recovery Verhaeren was seized by a limitless thirst for the intoxication of life, as though with one single leap he would make good the lost years of his loneliness, of his illness, and of his crisis. His eyes, his ears, his nerves, all his senses, which had been a-hungered, now pounce on things with a pleasure that is almost murderous, and snatch everything to themselves in a frenzy of greed. At this time Verhaeren travelled from country to country, as though he would take possession of all Europe. He was in Germany, in Berlin, in Vienna, and in Prague; always a lonely wanderer; quite alone; ignorant of the language, and listening only to the voice of the town itself, to the strange, sombre murmur-

ing, to the surge of the European metropolises. In Bayreuth he paid his devotions at the tomb of Wagner, whose music of ecstasy and passion he absorbed in Munich; in Colmar he learned to understand his beloved painter Mathias Grünewald; he saw and loved the tragic landscapes of northern Spain, those gloomy, treeless mountains, whose threatening silhouettes afterwards became the background of the fiery happenings in his drama of *Philip II.*; in Hamburg he was an excited spectator, day by day, of the stupendous traffic, the coming and going of the ships, the unloading and the loading of cargoes. Everywhere where life was intensive, expressive, and animated with a new energy, he passionately loved it. It is characteristic of his temperament that the harmonious beauty of peaceful and empty, of sleeping and dreaming cities appealed to him less than modern cities in their pall of soot and smoke. Almost intentionally his affection turns from the traditional ideal to one yet unknown. Florence, for many centuries the symbol of all poets, disappointed him: the Italian air was too mild, these contours were too meagre, too dreamy the streets. But London, this piled-up conglomeration of dwellings and workshops; this town that might have been cast in bronze; this teeming labyrinth of dingy streets; this ever-beating, restless heart of the world's trade with its smoke of toil threatening to eclipse the sun; this was to him a revelation. Just the industrial towns,

which had thus far tempted no poet; those towns which roll up the vault of their leaden sky with their own fog and smoke, which confine their inhabitants in leagues and leagues of congested masonry, these attract him. He, who revels in colour, grew fond of Paris, to which, since then, he has returned every year for the winter months. Just what is restless and busy, confused and breathless, hunted, eager, feverish, hot with an ardour as of rut, all this Babylonian medley lures him. He loves this pell-mell multiplicity and its strange music. Often he would travel for hours on the top of heavy omnibuses, to have a bird's-eye view of the bustling throng, and here he would close his eyes the better to feel the dull rumour, this surging sound which, in its ceaselessness, is not unlike the rustling of a forest, beating against his body. No longer as in his earlier books does he follow the existence of simple callings; he loves the ascension of handiwork to mechanical labour, in which the aim is invisible, and only the grandiose organisation is revealed. And gradually this interest became the motive interest of his life. Socialism, which in those years was becoming strong and active, fell like a red drop into the morbid paleness of his poetic work. Vandervelde, the leader of the Labour Party, became his friend. And when, at this stage, the party founded the Maison du Peuple at Brussels, he readily helped, gave lectures at the Université Libre, took part in all the projects, and after-

wards, in the most beautiful vision of his poetical work, lifted them far above the political and actual into the great events of all humanity. His life, now inwardly established, henceforth beats with a strong and regular rhythm. He had in the meantime, by his marriage, attained a personal appeasement, a counterpoise for his unbridled restlessness. Now his wild ecstasies have their fixed point, from which they can survey the fiery vortex of the new phenomena. The morbid pictures, the feverish hallucinations, now become clear visions; not by flashes of lightning, but in a steady, beaming light are the horizons of our time now illuminated for him.

Now that he steps boldly into life, his first problem is to come to an understanding with the world around him, with his fellow-men, with the city itself. But it is not the city he lives in which interests him in a provincial sense, but the ideal, modern city, the monster city in general, this strange and uncanny thing that like a vampire has snatched to herself all the strength of the soil and of men to form a new residuum of power. She crowds together the contrasts of life; grades, in unexpected layers, immense riches over the most wretched poverty; strengthens opposing forces, and goads them to hostility, goads them to that desperate battle in which Verhaeren loves to see all things involved. The grandeur of this new organism is beyond the æsthetics of the past; and new and strange before Nature stand men also,

with another rhythm, a hotter breath, quicker movements, wilder desires than were known to any association of men, to any calling or caste, of a previous time. It is a new outlook which not only sweeps the distance, but has also to reckon with height, with the piled tiers of houses, with new velocities and new conditions of space. A new blood, money, feeds these cities, a new energy fires them; they are driven to procreate a new faith, a new God, and a new art. Their dimensions, terrific, and of a beauty hitherto unknown, defy measurement; the order that rules is hidden in the earth behind a pathless wilderness.

> Quel océan, ses cœurs ? . . .
> Quels nœuds de volonté serrés en son mystère ![1]

cries out the poet in wonderment as he strides through the city and is overpowered by her grandeur:

> Toujours en son triomphe ou ses défaites,
> Elle apparaît géante, et son cri sonne et son nom luit.[2]

He feels that an enormous energy proceeds from her; he is conscious that her atmosphere rests with a new pressure on his body, that his blood quickens to keep pace with her rhythm. Merely to be near her starts the thrill of a new delight.

> En ces villes . . .
> . . . . .
> Je sens grandir et s'exalter en moi,
> Et fermenter, soudain, mon cœur multiplié.[3]

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[1] 'L'Âme de la Ville' (*Les Villes Tentaculaires*). [2] *Ibid.* (*Ibid.*).
[3] 'La Foule' (*Les Visages de la Vie*).

Involuntarily he feels himself becoming dependent on her, feels this grandiose coupling of energy producing a similar concentration of all his forces in himself too, feels his fever becoming infectious like her own, and feels—with an intensity unknown to any other poet of our days—the identity of his personality with the soul of the city. He knows she is dangerous, knows she will fill him with all restlessness, overheat him and excite him, confuse him with her hostile contrasts.

> Voici la ville en or des rouges alchimies,
> Où te fondre le cœur en un creuset nouveau
> Et t'affoler d'un orage d'antinomies
> Si fort qu'il foudroiera tes nerfs jusqu'au cerveau.[1]

But he knows that she will impregnate him as well, give him power from her strength. There will never be a great man again who will pass her by, who will not be thrilled by her sensation, who will not live with her, and by her grow. Henceforth all new and strong men will stand in reciprocal action with her.

This great recognition of a fact is, as we have seen, not spontaneous, but painfully acquired. For in the sense of the old beauty the aspect of a modern city is frightful. She is a sleepless, an ever wakeful woman; she does not, like Nature, sometimes rest; she is never silent. Restlessly she sucks men into her whirlpool; ceaselessly she pricks their nerves; day and night her life pulses. By day she is as grey as lead; a sultry shuttle of

[1] 'Les Villes' (*Les Flambeaux Noirs*).

passions; a dark mine in which men, buried in the mines of her streets, are forced to unresting toil. How dense are these virgin forests of bronze and stone; and of all these thousands of streets 'à poumons lourds et haletants, vers on ne sait quels buts inquiétants,' [1] not one seems to lead into the open, into the light of day. Monotonous, like dull eyes, glare the millions of windows; and the darksome caverns in which men, themselves like machines, sit by machines, thunder in the unseizable rhythm of petrified exertion. Not a ray is reflected on them from the eternal; hostile, repulsive, and grey the town pants in the puffed smoke of her daily labour. But night, softening all harsh lines, fierily welds the lumbering limbs together into something new. By night the town is turned into one great seduction. Passion, fettered in the day-time, breaks its chains:

. . . Pourtant, lorsque les soirs
Sculptent le firmament de leurs marteaux d'ébène,
La ville au loin s'étale et domine la plaine
Comme un nocturne et colossal espoir;
Elle surgit: désir, splendeur, hantise;
Sa clarté se projette en lueurs jusqu'aux cieux,
Son gaz myriadaire en buissons d'or s'attise,
Ses rails sont des chemins audacieux
Vers le bonheur fallacieux
Que la fortune et la force accompagnent;
Ses murs se dessinent pareils à une armée
Et ce qui vient d'elle encor de brume et de fumée
Arrive en appels clairs vers les campagnes.[2]

[1] 'L'Âme de la Ville' (*Les Villes Tentaculaires*).
[2] 'La Ville' (*Les Campagnes Hallucinées*).

These fiery eruptions Verhaeren shapes in grandiose visions. There is the vision of the music halls : wheels of fire revolve round a house, blazing letters climb up façades and lure the crowds to sit in front of the brilliant footlights. Here the people's hunger for sensation is fed full, and art is cruelly murdered day by day. Here tedium is tamed for an hour or so, and whipped up with colour, flame, and music for another pleasure that is waiting outside, as soon as the illusion here sinks into the night :

> Et minuit sonne et la foule s'écoule
> —Le hall fermé—parmi les trottoirs noirs ;
> Et sous les lanternes qui pendent,
> Rouges, dans la brume, ainsi que des viandes,
> Ce sont les filles qui attendent . . .[1]

they the harlots, ' les promeneuses,' ' les veuves d'elles-mêmes,' [2] who live on the sensual hunger of the masses. For sensual pleasure too is organised in cities, is guided into canals, like all instincts. But the primordial instinct is the same. The hunger which out in the fields and in the country was still pleasure in healthy food, in frothing beer, has here been converted into the idea of money. Money is what everybody hungers for here ; money is the meaning of the town. ' Boire et manger de l'or ' [3] is the hot dream of the crowd. Everything is expressed by money, ' tout se définit par des monnaies ' ; [4] all

[1] ' Les Spectacles ' (*Les Villes Tentaculaires*).
[2] ' Les Promeneuses ' (*Ibid.*).
[3] ' La Bourse ' (*Ibid.*).
[4] ' Le Bazar ' (*Ibid.*).

values are subordinate to this new value, monetary value. Superb is the vision of the bazaar, where, on all the counters, in the many stories, everything is sold, not only as in reality objects in common use, but, in a loftier symbolism, ethical values as well: convictions and opinions, fame and name, honour and power, all the laws of life. But all this fiery blood of money flows together in the great heart of the city, flows into the Exchange, that greedy maw that swallows all the gold and spits it out again, which smelts all this hectic fever and then pours it flaming into all the veins of the city. Everything can be bought, even pleasure: in back streets, in *l'étal*, in the haunts where debauch lies in wait, women sell themselves as goods are sold in the bazaar. But this energy is not always regulated, not always made to flow between dikes. Here too, as in Nature, there are sudden catastrophes. Sometimes revolt is kindled, flashes up instantaneously, and this stream of money blazes itself a new trail. The masses pour out of their dismal caverns, greed takes possession of men, and the myriad-headed monster fights and bleeds for this one thing, this red-burning, relucent gold.

But the great and powerful thing in these towns is not passion; it is the hidden strength behind these passions, the noble order that keeps them in their proper limits, and holds them in check. This rumbling chaos, this inundation of things

doomed to die, is dominated in the *Villes Tentaculaires* by three or four figures standing like statues—the tamers of passions. They are what kings and priests were of old, they who have the power of bridling ebullient energies and turning them to use. With hands of iron they hold down this wild and dangerous animal, they, the new rulers, statesmen, generals, demagogues, organisers. For the town is an animal in its movements, a beast in its passions, a brute in its instincts, a monster in its strength. It is ugly, like all rut. It cannot be contemplated with a pure pleasure, like a landscape gently and harmoniously fading in forest verdure ; it rather evokes, at first, loathing, hatred, caution, and hostility. But that is the great thing in Verhaeren, that he always overcomes whatever is hostile, pain and torment, by a great vista, that in this panting steam of the unæsthetic he already sees the flame of the new beauty. Here for the first time is seen the beauty of factories, *les usines rectangulaires*, the fascination of a railway station, the new beauty in the new things. If the town is indeed ugly in its denseness, ugly in the sense of all classical ideals ; if the picture of it is indeed cruel and frightful ; it is yet not unfertile. ' Le siècle et son horreur se condensent en elle, mais son âme contient la minute éternelle.' And this feeling, that in her the minute of eternity is contained, that she is the new thing risen above all the pasts, a new thing that one must perforce

come to terms with, this feeling makes her momentous and beautiful to the poet. If her form is loathsome, grey, and sombre, her idea, her organisation, are grandiose and admirable. And here, as always, where admiration finds a pivot, it can give the whole world the swing from negation to assent.

But Verhaeren is by this time too little of an artist, too much interested in all the problems of life, to be able to contemplate the idea of the modern city from the æsthetic side alone. It is for him a still more important symbol for the expression of contemporary feeling.

Not only the problem of the new social stratification is poetically digested in his trilogy, but also one of the most burning and pressing questions of political economy as of politics, the struggle between the centrifugal and the centripetal power, the struggle between agrarianism and industrialism. Town and country purchase their prosperity, the one by the impoverishment of the other. Production and trade, however much one is the condition of the other, at their extreme points are hostile forces. And how, in our days in Europe, the victory between town and country is being decided in favour of the town; how, gradually, the town is absorbing the best strength of the provinces—the problem of the *déracinés*—this has for the first time in poetry been described by Verhaeren in his magnificent vision of *Les Villes Tentaculaires*. The cities have sprung

up like mushrooms. Millions have conglomerated. But where have they come from? From what sources have these immense masses suddenly streamed into the mighty reservoirs? The answer is quick to come. The heart of the city is fed with the oozing blood of the country. The country is impoverished. As though they were hallucinated, the peasants migrate to where gold is minted, to the town that in the evenings flames across the horizon; to where alone riches lies, and power. They march away with their carts, to sell their last stick of furniture, their last rags; they march away with their daughter, to deliver her up to lust; they march away with their son, to let him perish in the factories; they march away to dip their hands, they also, in this roaring river of gold. The fields are deserted. Only the fantastic figures of idiots stagger along lonely paths; the abandoned flour-mills are empty, and only turn when the wind smites against them. Fever rises from the marshes, where the water, no longer gathered into dikes, spreads putrefaction and pestilence. Beggars drag themselves from door to door, with the country's barrenness reflected in their eyes; to the last lingering cultivators come, sinuously, their worst enemies, *les donneurs de mauvais conseils*. The emigration agent entices them to wander to the lands of gold, and they squander what they have inherited from their ancestors, to seek a far-distant hope:

Avec leur chat, avec leur chien,
Avec, pour vivre, quel moyen ?
S'en vont, le soir, par la grand'route.[1]

And they who are not enticed away by emigration are evicted from hearth and home by usurers. Villages in which the dance of the kermesse has long been silent are of a sudden cut in two by a network of railways. There is no fairness in the fight. The country is conquered because the blood of its inhabitants has been sucked out of it. 'La plaine est morte et ne se défend plus.'[2] Everything streams to Oppidomagnum. This is the name given by Verhaeren in his symbolical drama *Les Aubes*—which, with the *Campagnes Hallucinées* and the *Villes Tentaculaires* forms the trilogy of the social revolution—to the monster city. This, with its arms as of a polypus, pitilessly sucks all the strength of the district round it. From all sides strength streams in upon it. 'Tous les chemins se rythment vers elle.' Not only from the country does she drink the strength of men, all the ocean seems to be pouring its waters only to her port. 'Toute la mer va vers la ville.'[3] The whole sea streams to the city; all the rolling waves seem only to exist that they may bring to her this wandering forest of ships. And she absorbs everything, digests it in the 'noire immensité des usines rectangulaires,'[4] greedily devours it, to spit it out again as gold.

[1] 'Le Départ' (*Les Campagnes Hallucinées*).
[2] 'La Plaine' (*Les Villes Tentaculaires*).
[3] 'Le Port' (*Ibid.*).
[4] 'La Plaine' (*Ibid.*).

But this immense social struggle between the country and the town expresses, like the other new phases, something yet higher. It is only a momentary symbol of an eternal schism. The country is the symbol of the Conservatives. In the country the forms of labour are petrified, calm, and regular; there life is without haste, and only regulated by the rotation of the seasons. All sensations, all forms are pure and simple. These men stand nearer to the freaks of chance: a flash of lightning, a hail-storm can destroy their labour; and so they fear God, and do not dare to doubt in Him. The town, however, symbolises progress. In the thunder of the streets of to-day no Madonna's voice is heard; the life of the individual is protected from chance by prearranged order; the fever of the new creates also a yearning for new conditions of life, new circumstances, for a new God.

> L'esprit des campagnes était l'esprit de Dieu ;
> Il eut la peur de la recherche et des révoltes,
> Il chut ; et le voici qui meurt, sous les essieux
> Et sous les chars en feu des récoltes.[1]

If the country was the past, the town is the future. The country only seeks to keep what it has, to preserve: its character, its beauty, its God. But the town must first of all create, must make itself the new beauty, the new faith, and the new God.

[1] 'Vers le Futur' (*Les Villes Tentaculaires*).

Le rêve ancien est mort et le nouveau se forge.
Il est fumant dans la pensée et la sueur
Des bras fiers de travail, des fronts fiers de lueurs,
Et la ville l'entend monter du fond des gorges
De ceux qui le portent en eux
Et le veulent crier et sangloter aux cieux.[1]

But we, Verhaeren thinks, must not belong to this world of the past, this moribund world; no, we who live in towns must think with them, must live with the new age, create in league with it, and find a new language for its dumb yearning. A return to nature is no longer possible for us: evolution cannot be screwed back again. If we have lost great values, we must replace them by new; if our religious feeling for the old God is cold and dead, we must create new ideals. We must find new aims that our ancestors knew not of; in the new forms of the city we must find a new beauty, in her noises a new rhythm, in her confusion an order, in her energy an object, in her stammering a language.

If the towns have destroyed much, they will perhaps create still more. In their melting-pot professions, races, religions, nations, languages are blended:

. . . les Babels enfin réalisées
Et les peuples fondus et la cité commune
Et les langues se dissolvant en une.[2]

'The old order changeth, giving place to new'; and we must not ask whether the new is better

[1] 'L'Âme de la Ville' (*Les Villes Tentaculaires*).
[2] 'Le Port' (*Ibid.*).

than the old; we must trust that it is so. The feverish convulsions of the great cities, this unrest, this screaming torment, cannot be in vain. For they, these pains and convulsions, are only the birth-throes of the new. But he who has been the first to feel, with a glad presentiment, this pain of the masses, this fermentation, as joy, this unrest as hope, must himself be an authentic new man, one of those who are called to give a poetic answer to all the complaints and questions of our time.

THE MULTITUDE

Mets en accord ta force avec les destinées
Que la foule, sans le savoir,
Promulgue, en cette nuit d'angoisse illuminée.
É. V., 'La Foule.'

THAT great event which is the modern city was at bottom only possible by the organisation of the mighty multitudes of the people and the distribution of their forces. To organise is to weld unlike forces economically into an organism, to imitate something that has life and soul, in which nothing is superfluous and everything is necessary; it is to give a material its uniform strength, to give an idea the flesh and bones of its shape and of its possibility. Now the town has smelted the scattered forces of the country into a new material—into the multitude; it has converted much that used to be individually active force into mechanical force; it has humbled man to the condition of a handle, a rolling wheel; it has everywhere tied up the individuality of the single man in order to produce a new individuality, that of the crowd. For the multitude as a fact is a new thing. For centuries it was only a symbol, an idea. The inhabitants of whole countries were logically epitomised in a number, but with no

suggestion of thus comprehending their immediate unity. Of course, in times past great armies have been known, hordes of fighting men and nomad tribes; but these only represented a volatile concentration, too unsettled, too inconstant to procreate an individuality, an æsthetic and moral value. And even those armies whose legendary greatness echoes down the centuries, the hordes of Tamerlaine, the hosts of the Persians, the legions of Rome, how poor is their number in comparison with the masses of human beings daily herded together in New York or London or Paris! Only in our own days, only in Oppido-magnum, has the multitude been welded together finally and for all time, been hooked together with bands of steel like the wheels of an immense machine; only recently has the crowd become a living being that grows and multiplies like a forest. Democracy has given it new intellectual forms, set a brain in the body, by making the multitude determinate, subject only to itself. It is a creation of the nineteenth century; it is a new value in our lives, and one that we must come to terms with; no less a value for our evolution than the highest values of the past. Walt Whitman, to whom one must constantly refer in dealing with Verhaeren's work, although —let it be expressly stated here—Verhaeren quite independently and unconsciously arrived at the same goal from the same starting-point, once said: 'Modern science and democracy seemed to be

throwing out their challenge to poetry to put them in its statements in contradistinction to the songs and myths of the past.' [1] And every modern poet will have to come to terms with the masses of democracy, will have to contemplate them synthetically as an individual living being, as a man, or as a God. In his Utopian drama *Les Aubes* Verhaeren has ranged them among the dramatis personæ, and, to express his inner vision, he has added this stage direction : ' Les groupes agissent comme un seul personnage à faces multiples et antinomiques.' For, like the images of Indian gods, they have a hundred arms, but their cry is in unison ; their will is simple ; their energy is uniform ; one and the same is their heart, ' le cœur myriadaire et rouge de la foule.' [2] A hundred years of life in communion, a hundred years of distress in common, of hope in common, have welded them together into one unity, into one new feeling. Sleepless and restless like a dangerous animal lies the multitude in the monster cities ; all the passions of individual man are hers, vanity, hunger, anger ; she has all vices and crimes in common with her smallest member, man ; only, everything in her is intensified to unknown magnitudes. Everything in her passions is stupendously superdimensional, beyond calculation, and, in a new sense, divine. For just as the gods of old were formed after the

[1] *A Backward Glance O'er Travelled Roads.*
[2] ' La Conquête (*La Multiple Splendeur*).

image of man, save that they represented man's strength and intelligence magnified to the hundredth degree, the multitude is the synthesis of individual forces, the most prolific accumulation of passion.

With the multitude the individual comes into being, and without her he perishes. Consciously or unconsciously, every man is subject to her power. For the modern man is no longer free from the influence of others, as the tiller of the fields was in olden days, or the shepherd, or the hunter, each of whom was dependent only on the anger of heaven, the whims of the earth, on weather and hailstorms, on chance, which he clad in the august image of his god. The modern man is in all his feelings determined by the world around him, set in his place in the ranks, and moved with the ranks like a shuttle to and fro; he is a dependent in his instincts. We all feel socially; we cannot think away the others who are round us and in front of us any more than we can think away the air that nourishes us. We can flee from them, but we cannot flee away from what has penetrated us from them. For the multitude rules us like a force of nature, nourishes us with its feelings. The unsocial man is a fiction. Just as little as in a great city one can shut off one's room entirely from the noise, the rhythm of the street, just so little can one think isolatedly, just so little can the soul keep itself at a distance from the great intellectual excitements

of the multitude. Verhaeren himself made the attempt in the days when he wrote the verses :

> Mon rêve, enfermons-nous dans ces choses lointaines
> Comme en de tragiques tombeaux.[1]

But the life of reality claimed him again ; for society destroys him who turns away from her, as one is destroyed who shuts himself out from the fresh air. The poet, too, must involuntarily think with the multitude and of the multitude. For to the same extent as democracy has exercised its levelling influence, to the same extent as it has limited individualities, enrolled the poet among the class of citizens, diminished the contrasts of chance, it has at the same time matured new forces in their multiplicity. In democracy the modern poet can find everything for which the ancients felt constrained to discover gods, those incalculable forces which bind the individual like enchantment. The town, the multitude feeds his energy with its exhaustless abundance ; it multiplies his own strength. For everything the individual has lost is stored in it, great heroism and ecstatic enthusiasm. It is the great source of the unexpected and the incalculable in our days, the new thing concerning which no one knows how great it will grow. To have seen in it an enrichment, instead of a restriction, of the poetic instinct, is one of the great merits of Verhaeren. For while the majority of con-

[1] 'Sous les Prétoriens' (*Au Bord de la Route*).

temporary poets still maintain the fiction of the recluse in his wistful loneliness, while they recoil from before the multitude as though from men stricken with the plague, while they create for themselves an artificial seclusion, and heedlessly go their way past locomotives and telegraphs, banks and workshops, Verhaeren drinks greedily from these sources of new strength.

> Comme une vague en des fleuves perdue,
> Comme une aile effacée, au fond de l'étendue,
> Engouffre-toi,
> Mon cœur, en ces foules battant les capitales !
> Réunis tous ces courants
> Et prends
> Si large part à ces brusques métamorphoses
> D'hommes et de choses,
> Que tu sentes l'obscure et formidable loi
> Qui les domine et les opprime
> Soudainement, à coups d'éclairs, s'inscrire en toi.[1]

For she, 'la foule,' the multitude, is the great transposer of values in our day. She takes into her bosom and transforms the men who come to her from the country, from the four winds of heaven; none of us escapes her levelling power. The most distant races are blended in the city's huge melting-pot, are adapted to one another, and forthwith become a new thing, a different thing, a new race, the new race of contemporary man, who has made his peace with the atmosphere of the great city, who not only painfully feels the depression of her walls and his divorce from Nature, but creates himself a new strength

[1] 'La Foule' (*Les Visages de la Vie*).

and a new feeling of the universe in this manifold human presence. The great feat of the multitude is that it accelerates the process of changing values. The individual elements perish in favour of this individuality of a new community. Old communities lose their unity, new communities must arise. America is the first example: here, in a hundred years, one single great brotherhood, a new type, has been developed from the forces of a thousand peoples; and in our capitals, in Paris, Berlin, and London, people are already growing up who are not Frenchmen and not Germans, but in the first place only Parisians and Berliners, who have a different accent, a different way of thinking, whose native land is the great city, the multitude. The inhabitant of the great city, the democratic man of the multitude, is a sharply defined character. If he is a poet, his poetry must be social; if he is a thinker, the intelligence of the masses, the instinct of the many, must be his also. To have attempted the psychology of this multitude for the first time in poetry is one of the great feats of audacity for which we must be grateful to Verhaeren.

But these individual accumulations of men into a multitude, these combinations of millions into towns, are not isolated. One bond holds them all together: modern traffic. The distances of reality have disappeared, and with them national divisions as well. By the side of the problem of individual conglomerations which only slowly are

transformed into organisms, by the side of the individual races, the individual masses, now arises a greater synthesis, the synthesis of the European race. For the men of our continent are no longer so distant, so strange to one another as they formerly were. Social democracy with its organisation encompasses the masses from one end of Europe to the other. To-day the same desires fire the men of Paris, London, St. Petersburg, Vienna, and Rome. And already one common formula directs their exertions : money.

> Races des vieux pays, forces désaccordées,
> Vous nouez vos destins épars, depuis le temps
> Que l'or met sous vos fronts le même espoir battant.[1]

Independently of the frontiers of countries, on a broad-based foundation, a unified race, a new community, the European, is in process of formation. Here desire and reality are near touching. Verhaeren sees Europe already united by one great common energy. Europe is for him the land of consciousness. While other continents, distant as though in a dream, are still living a vegetative life, while Africa and India are still dreaming as they dreamt in the darkness of primitive times, Europe is 'la forge où se frappe l'idée,'[2] the great smithy in which all differences, all individual observations, all results, are hammered and moulded into a new intellectuality, into *European consciousness*. The union is not yet inwardly complete ; states are still

[1] 'La Conquête' (*La Multiple Splendeur*). [2] *Ibid.* (*Ibid.*).

hostile and ignorant of their community; but already 'le monde entier est repensé par leurs cervelles.'[1] Already they are working at the transvaluation of all feeling in the European sense. For a new system of ethics, a new system of æsthetics, will be required by the European, who, rich by the past, strong in the feeling of the multitude, is now conscious of drawing his strength from new masses. Here it is that Verhaeren's work sings over into Utopia; and in *Les Aubes*, the epilogue to *Les Villes Tentaculaires*, this glittering rainbow rises over the visions of reality to the new ideal; the prophetic dream of a better future rises over the still struggling present.

This yearning for the European has been expressed for the first time in poetry by Verhaeren, almost contemporaneously with Walt Whitman's hailing of the American and Friedrich Nietzsche's prophecy of the superman. It would be a tempting task, and full of interest, to set up the Pan-European in antithesis to the Pan-American. But to say that Verhaeren was the first of lyric poets to feel as consciously European as Walt Whitman felt American, is to establish his rank among the most considerable men of our time. Verhaeren is possibly the only lyric poet who has felt in accordance with contemporary feeling. That epitomises his whole claim to gratitude, for it sufficiently expresses the fact that he has taken

[1] 'La Conquête' (*Les Forces Tumultueuses*).

to his heart the problem of the multitude; the energy of social innovations; the æsthetics of organisation; the grandeur of mechanical production; in a word, the poetry of material things. It is our own time, the new age, that speaks in his verse; and it speaks in its new language. This rhythm which he has discovered is no literary abstraction, but beats in perfect unison with the heart-beat of the crowd; it is an echo of the panting of our monster cities, of the clanking of trains, of the cry of the people; his language is new, because it is no longer the voice of one man, but unites in itself the many voices of the multitude. He has penetrated deeper than any other man into the feeling of the masses, and their surf echoes more strongly in his verse. The hollow rumbling, the bestial and tameless strength of their voice, the surf of the multitude, has here become shape and music, the highest identity. With pride one can say of Verhaeren what he himself vaunts in his 'Captain': 'Il est la foule,'[1] he himself is the multitude.

[1] 'Le Capitaine' (*Les Forces Tumultueuses*).

THE RHYTHM OF LIFE

Dites, les rythmes sourds dans l'univers entier !
En définir la marche et la passante image
En un soudain langage ;

. . . . . .

Prendre et capter cet infini en un cerveau,
Pour lui donner ainsi sa plus haute existence.

É. V., 'Le Verbe'.

THE rhythm of modern life is a rhythm of excitement. The city with its multitudes is never completely at rest : even in its repose, in its silence, there is a secret bubbling as of lava in the bowels of a volcano, a waiting and watching, a nervous tension tinged with fever. For the idea of energy in the myriad-headed monster city is so concentrated, so intensified, that it never loses its rumbling activity. Rest, a polar feeling, would be the inner negation, the annihilation, of this new element. True, the city with her teeming masses is not always in the fever-throes of those great eruptions of passion when through the arteries of her streets the blood streams suddenly ; when all her muscles seem to contract ; when cries and enthusiasm blaze up like a flame ; but always something seems to be expecting this fiery second, just as in modern man there is always the whipped unrest that is avid of new

things, new experiences. Modern cities are in perpetual vibration; and so is the multitude from man to man. Even if the individual is not excited, if his nerves are not always stirring with his own vibration, they are yet always vibrating in harmony with the obscure resonance of the universe. The great city's rhythm beats in our very sleep; the new rhythm, the rhythm of our life, is no longer the regular alternation of relaxation and repose, it is the steady vibration of an unintermitted activity.

Now, a modern poet who wishes to create in real harmony with contemporary feeling must himself have something of the perpetual excitement, the unremitting watchfulness, the restless and nervous sensitiveness of our time; his heart must unconsciously beat in tact with the rhythm of the world around him. But not only unrest must flicker in him, not only must that excessive delicacy of feeling which is almost morbid be in him, this neurasthenic sleeplessness—not only the negative element of our epoch, but the grandiose as well, the superdimensional, the spontaneity of the sudden discharge of forces held in reserve, the overwhelming force of the great eruption. Like the masses of our towns, he must be so fashioned that a trifle will stimulate him to the greatest passion, must be so fashioned that he cannot help being carried away by the intoxication of his own strength. Just as the masses have, so to speak, organised themselves as a body,

so that there is no individual excitement in them, no irritation and inflammation of any single part, but so that a reaction of the whole body responds to every separate irritation, just in the same manner must the excitement of a modern, a contemporary poet, a poet of a great town, never be the excitement of a single sense, but, if it is to be strong, it must quiver through the whole body like an electric shock. His poetic rhythm must therefore be physically vital; it must envelop all his feeling and thinking; it must respond to every individual irritation, to every individual sensation, with the massed weight of feeling of all his vital forces: the need of a rhythm strained to the full must be, as Nietzsche has so wonderfully demonstrated in his *Ecce Homo!* a measure for the strength of the inspiration, a sort of balancing, as it were, of the pressure and tension of the inspiration. For the poet of to-day, if he does not wish to remain the poet of the eternal yesterday, must, as a microcosm, imitate in his passion the macrocosm of the multitude, wherein also the excitement of the individual is trivial and aimless, and only the ebullition of the whole fermenting mass is irresistible and momentous.

Then, in such poems, the *rhythm of modern life* will break through. At this moment we must remember what rhythm really means. The rhythm of a being is in the last instance nothing but its breathing. Everything that is alive, every organism, has breath, the interchange and

resting-space between giving and taking. And so breathes a poem too; and it is worthless if it is not a living thing, if it is not an organism, a body with a soul. Only in its rhythm does it become alive, as man does in his breathing. But the diversity, the originality of the rhythm only arises from the alternation of these drawn breaths. Breathing is different in those who are calm, excited, joyous, nervous, oppressed, ecstatic. Every sensation produces its corresponding rhythm. And since every poet in his individuality represents a new form of inner passion, his poem too must have this rhythm of his own, the rhythm which expresses his personal poetic peculiarity just as characteristically as his speaking expresses an individual accent and dialect. To understand Verhaeren's rhythm we must remember this basic form of the poetic feeling at the heart of him; we must compare it with the feeling at the heart of those who have gone before him. In Victor Hugo there was the earnest, great, soaring rhythm of the loud speaker, of the preacher who never addresses individuals but always the whole nation; in Baudelaire there was the regular hymnic rhythm of the priest of art; in Verlaine the irregular, sweet, and gentle melody of one speaking in dreams. In Verhaeren, now, there is the rhythm of a man hurrying, rushing, running; of a restless, passionate man; the rhythm of the modern, of the Americanised man. It is often irregular; you hear in it the panting of one who

is hunted, who is hurrying to his goal; you hear his impact with the obstacles he stumbles against, the sudden standstill of intemperate effort exhausted. But with him the rhythmic energy is never intellectual, never verbal, never musical; it is purely emotional, physical. Not only the end of the nerve vibrates and sounds; not only does the language shake the air; but out of the whole organism, as though all the nerve-strings had suddenly begun to sound the alarm, burst the terror and the ecstasy of fever. His poem is never a state of repose—no more than the multitude is ever quite repose—it is in a true sense rhythm, passion set in motion. You feel the excitement of the man in it, motion, the covering of a distance, activity; never contemplation comfortably resting, or dream girt with sleep. And as a matter of fact, it is from motion in the physical sense that nearly all his poems have arisen: Verhaeren has never composed poetry at his writing-table, but while wandering over the fields with a rhythmically moved body whose accelerated pace pulses to the very heart of the poem, or while rushing along through the din and bustle of streets in great cities. In these poems is that quicker rolling of the blood that comes from exercise, that jerk of unrest and passion tearing themselves away from repose. You feel that in this man feeling is too strong, that he would fain free himself from it, run away from it in his own body. The feeling is so strong that

it turns to pain, or rather pressure, and the poem is nothing else than the erection that precedes relief, the throes that bring forth out of pregnancy. Just as the multitude in revolt bursts the bonds of its excitement and launches of a sudden all the passion dammed back for centuries, so springs from the poet like a geyser the passionate assault of words bursting from too long silence. These cries are a physical relief. These ' élans captifs dans le muscle et la chair ' [1] are the relief of a convulsion, the easy breathing after oppression. As a passionate man is forced to relieve himself by gestures, or in a fit of rage, or in cries, or in weeping, or in some other state opposed to rest, the poet discharges his feeling in rhythmic words: 'L'homme à vous prononcer respirait plus à l'aise' [2] he has said of the man who was the first to force the excess of his feeling into speech.

It is, then, a force positively physical which produces Verhaeren's rhythm. It is difficult to prove such an assertion, for the state of creation is unconscious and unapproachable, although it may intuitively be detected in those moments of recreation, in that second of a new birth when a poet recites his work, when he feels, as it were, the pressure of the feeling weighing upon him artificially in recollection, when by the force of his imagination he relieves himself again as at the birth of the poem. And any one who has once heard Verhaeren reciting poetry will know how

[1] 'Le Verbe' (*La Multiple Splendeur*). [2] *Ibid.* (*Ibid.*).

much with him the rhythm of body and poem is one and indivisible, how the excitement that becomes rhythmical in the vibrating word is at the same time converted into the identical gesture. The calm eyes grow keen, they seem to pierce the near paper; the arm is raised commandingly, and every finger of the hand is stretched out to mark the cæsura as though with an electric shock; to hammer the verses; and with the voice to eject the hurrying and almost screaming words into the room. In his movements there is then that terrific effort of one who would fain tear himself away from himself, that sublimest gesture of the poet striving away from the earth, striving away from himself, from the heavy gait of words to winged passion. Man coalesces with Nature in one second of the most wonderful identity:

> Les os, le sang, les nerfs font alliance
> Avec on ne sait quoi de frémissant
> Dans l'air et dans le vent;
> On s'éprouve léger et clair dans l'espace,
> On est heureux à crier grâce,
> Les faits, les principes, les lois, on comprend tout;
> Le cœur tremble d'amour et l'esprit semble fou
> De l'ivresse de ses idées.[1]

Every time that Verhaeren reads his poetry, this re-birth of the first creative state is renewed. *It is in the first place a deliverance from pain, and in the second place it is pleasure.* Again and again

[1] 'Les Heures où l'on crée' (*Les Forces Tumultueuses*).

the word darts along like a beast let loose ; in the wildest rhythm ; in a rhythm that begins slowly, cautiously ; quickens ; then grows wilder and wilder ; grows to an intoxicating monotony, an ever-increasing speed, a rattling din that reminds one of an express whizzing along at full speed. Like a locomotive — for in Verhaeren's case one has to think in images of this kind, and not in outworn tropes as of Pegasus— the poem rushes on, driven only by a measure which reminds one of the short explosions of an automobile. And as a matter of fact the scansion of the locomotive, its restless rattling, has often been the cause of the rhythmic velocity of his verses. Verhaeren himself is fond of relating that he has often, and with delight, written poems on railway journeys, and that the cadence of his verse has then been fired by the regular rattle of the train. He describes wonderfully the rapture of the speed poured into his blood by the whizzing past of trains. The whistling of the wind in moaning trees, the dashing of the foaming sea along the shore, the echo a thousand times repeated of thunder in the mountains, all these strong sounds have become rhythm in his poems ; all noisy things, all violent, swift emotions have made it brusque, angry, and excited :

> Oh ! les rythmes fougueux de la nature entière
> Et les sentir et les darder à travers soi !
> Vivre les mouvements répandus dans les bois,
> Le sol, les vents, la mer et les tonnerres ;

Vouloir qu'en son cerveau tressaille l'univers ;
Et pour en condenser les frissons clairs
En ardentes images,
Aimer, aimer, surtout la foudre et les éclairs
Dont les dévorateurs de l'espace et de l'air
Incendient leur passage ! [1]

But this is the new thing in Verhaeren, that he has transformed into rhythm not only the voice of Nature, but also the new noises, the grumbling of the multitude, the raging of cities, the rumbling of workshops. Often in his rhythm can be heard the beat of hammers ; the hard, edged, regular whizzing of wheels ; the whirring of looms ; the hissing of locomotives ; often the wild, restless tumult of streets ; the humming and rumbling of dense masses of the people. Poets before him imitated in the harmony of their verse the monotony of sources and the babbling of water over pebbles, or the soughing voice of the wind. But he makes the voice of the new things speak ; makes the rhythm of the city, this rhythm of fever and of unrest, this nervous moving of the crowd, this unquiet billowing of a new ocean, flow over into his new poem. Hence this up and down in his verses ; this suddenness and unexpectedness ; this incalculable element. *The new, the industrial noises have here become the music of poetry.* Since he does not seek to express his own individual sensation of life, but would himself only be a voice for

[1] L'En-Avant' (*Les Forces Tumultueuses*).

the multitude, the rhythm is more roaring and restless than that of any individual being. Like the first poets, those of old time, before whom there were no outworn and exhausted words; like the poets whose feeling burst into flame at every word, every cry; who discovered themselves 'en exaltant la souffrance, le mal, le plaisir, le bien'; like them when they

> . . . confrontaient à chaque instant
> Leur âme étonnée et profonde
> Avec le monde,[1]

poets who would be modern must compare their own soul with that of their time, must always regulate their rhythm according to the mutation of their time. Their deepest yearning must be to find not only their own personal expression, but over and above it the poetic and musical representation of the highest identity between themselves and their time. For poets are the inheritors of a great patrimony:

> . . . En eux seuls survit, ample, intacte et profonde,
> L'ardeur
> Dont s'enivrait, devant la terre et sa splendeur,
> L'homme naïf et clair aux premiers temps du monde;
> C'est que le rythme universel traverse encor
> Comme aux temps primitifs leur corps.[2]

They must, in these days, only express themselves when they have first adapted the rhythm of their own feeling to that of the universe, to the rhythm of the cities they live in, to the rhythm

[1] 'Le Verbe' (*La Multiple Splendeur*). [2] *Ibid.* (*Ibid.*).

of the multitude from which they have grown, to the rhythm of temporal as of eternal things. They must, like a vein in the heart of the world, reproduce every beat of the great hammer, every excitement, quickening of pace and obstruction of the feeling rolled round in the whole organism ; they must learn from life the rhythm which shall again achieve the great harmony that was lost between the world and the work of art.

THE NEW PATHOS

Lassé des mots, lassé des livres,
. . . .
Je cherche, en ma fierté,
L'acte qui sauve et qui délivre.
É. V., 'L'Action.'

THE primitive poem, that which came into being long before writing or print, was nothing but a modulated cry that was hardly language, a cry won from joy or pain, mourning or despair, recollection or passionate entreaty, but always from fulness of feeling. It was pathetic, because it was produced by passion; pathetic, because its intention was to produce passion. The poem of those great and distant men who were the first to find word and speech in the darted cry of feeling, was an invocation of the crowd; an exhortation; a fiery incitement; an ecstasy; a direct electric discharge of feeling to feeling. The poet spoke to the others, an individual to a circle. The auditors stood before him in expectation—somewhat as Max Klinger in his new picture has gathered them together in front of blind Homer—they waited, watched, listened, surrendered themselves, let themselves be carried away; or they resisted. That poem and the delivery of it were not something finished and presented for

approval; no vessel or ornament already hammered into shape and perfectly chiselled; they were something in the process of creation, something newly growing at that moment, a struggle with the hearer, a wrestling with him for his passion.

Poets lost this close, glowing contact with the masses when writing was invented. What the dissemination of the written word, and still more, in after days, the infinite multiplication of printing, dowered them with; all the new influence over spaces hitherto closed; the fact that their words were henceforth alive in countries which they had never visited; that men drew strength and inspiration and vital courage from their words long after their own bodies had fallen into dust—this vast and mighty effect had only been obtained by relinquishing that other and perhaps not lesser effect—dialogue, that standing face to face with the multitude. By slow degrees poets became something imaginary to the public. When they spoke, they really only listened to themselves; more and more their poem became a lonely colloquy with themselves; the harangue became a monologue, more and more lyrical in a new sense and less and less moving. More and more their poem travelled away from speech; more and more it lost that mysterious, passionate fire that is only fed by the moment, by standing face to face with an excited crowd, by the magical influx of tension and stimulation out of the heart of the

hearer into the poet's own words. For, with his expectation, with his eager eyes, his excitement, and his intractable impatience, every listener does something for the speaker: he goads him; he forces something of his expectant restlessness into the response that has not yet been made. But the moment the poet no longer spoke to the crowd, no longer to a circle, but fashioned his words for print and writing, a new and peculiar sensation was developed in him. He accustomed himself to speaking only for himself; to conceiving his own feeling as important, irrespective of effect and force; to holding a conversation with none but himself and silence. And his poem changed more and more. Now that the poet no longer had the panting roar of the response, the cry of passion, the exultation of enthusiasm, as the finale of his poetry—the last accord, as it were, belonging to his own music—he sought to complete the harmony in the verse by means of itself. He rounded his poem with an artist's care, as though it were an earthenware vessel; illumined it with colours like a picture; filled it with music; more and more he relinquished the idea of persuading, of convincing, of inspiring. He was content that the poem should have no feeling for other men, and gave it only the life and the mood of his own world. In that period of transition, we may suppose, 'poetic' diction first came into being, that language by the side of the living language which petrified

more and more as time went on into a dialect hostile to the world, into bloodless marble. Of old, the poetic language was not one that existed side by side with the real language; it was only the last intensification of the real language. By the rhythm of higher passion, by the fire of harangue, it became a sacred fire, a blest intoxication, a festivity in the work-a-day world. Thus, as intensified vitality, language could be different without ever being unintelligible, could remain with and yet above the people, while the lyric poetry of to-day has become, for the most part, strange and worthless to active men who live in the midst of realities, to the artisan and the toiler.

Nevertheless in our own days there seem to be signs of a return to this primitive close contact between the poet and his audience; a new pathos is at its birth. The stage was the first bridge between the poet and the multitude. But here the actor was still the intermediary of the spoken word; the purely lyrical emotion was not an aim in itself, but only, for three or four hours, a help in the illusion. However, the time of the isolation of the poet from the crowd, which was formerly rendered necessary by the great distances between nation and nation, seems now to have been overcome by the shortening of space and by the industrialisation of cities. To-day poets once again recite their verse in lecture-halls, in the popular universities of America; nay, in

churches Walt Whitman's lines ring out into the American consciousness, and what used to be created only by the seething seconds of political crises—one might instance Petöfi declaiming his national anthem ' Talpra Magyar ' from the steps of the university to the revolutionary crowd—occurs almost every day. Now again as of old the lyric poet seems entitled to be, if not the intellectual leader of the time, at least he who must excite and quell the passions of the time; the rhapsodist who hails, kindles, and fans that holy fire, energy. The world seems to be waiting for Him who shall concentrate all life in a flash of lightning to light up all the deeps of darkness:

> Il monte—et l'on croirait que le monde l'attend,
> Si large est la clameur des cœurs battant
> À l'unisson de ses paroles souveraines.
> Il est effroi, danger, affre, fureur et haine ;
> Il est ordre, silence, amour et volonté ;
> Il scelle en lui toutes les violences lyriques.[1]

Certainly the poem which would speak to the multitude must be different to the kind of poem that pleased our fathers. Above all, it must itself be a will, an aim, an energy, an evocation. All the technical excellence, the sweet music, the craft of vibrating rhythms, suppleness and flexibility of language, must, in the new poem, no longer be an aim in themselves, but only a means to kindle enthusiasm. Such a poem must no longer be a sentimental dialogue between a hermit and

[1] ' Le Tribun ' (*Les Forces Tumultueuses*).

some other hermit, a stranger somewhere far away; it must no longer be the short, hurriedly trembling voice which is silenced ere the word's flame has blazed up in it; no, this new poem must be strongly exulting, richly inspired, with a far horizon for its goal, and rushing on with irresistible impetuosity. It is not written for gentle moods, but for loud, resonant words. He who would quell the crowd must have the rhythm of their own new and restless life in him; he who speaks to the crowd must be inspired by the new pathos. And this new pathos, this 'pathos which most of all accepts the world as it is' (in Nietzsche's sense), is, above all, zest, is the strength and the will to create ecstasy. This poem must not be sensitive and woebegone; it must not express a personal grief that seeks to enlist the sympathies of others; no, it must be inspired by a fulness of joy, by the will to create from joy itself passion that cannot be held down. Only great feelings bear the message to the crowd; small feelings, which can only in silence, as in motionless air, rise above the ground, are dashed down again. *The new pathos must contain the will, not to set souls in vibration, not to provide a delicate, æsthetic sense of pleasure, but to fire to a deed.* It must carry the hearer along with it; it must once again collect in itself the scattered forces of the poet of old time; it must in the poet re-create, for an hour, the demagogue, the musician, the actor, the orator; it must snatch the word

again off the paper into the air; it must carefully entrust feeling as a secret treasure to the individual; it must hurl this treasure into the surf of a multitude. Poems with such a new pathos cannot be created by feeble, passive men, whose mood can be changed at any minute by the world around them, but only by fighting natures, who are governed by an idea, by the thought of a duty; who seek to force their feeling on others; who elevate their inspiration to the inspiration of the whole world.

This new lyric pathos is in our days growing lustily into life again. For centuries rhetoricians have been mocked at. The change of estimation in Schiller's case from worship to sufferance is a lasting proof. And let us remember that Nietzsche, the only German who in recent years has influenced the world, was only able to do so by creating a new rhetorical style—'I am the inventor of the dithyramb'—only by making his *Zarathustra* a preacher's book which insistently requires a loud, resonant voice. In France it was Victor Hugo who first recognised the necessity of direct address. But he, who, as it happens, stands on that narrowest boundary-line which separates genius from talent, he of whom one can say that he was either the least of the eternal, monumental poets or the greatest of the minor, the derivative poets, he confined himself to France, he never thought of any but the French nation—as Walt Whitman never thought of any

but the American nation—and, above all, he had not the high place whence to speak to his nation. He would have been greater if he had really had the tribune whence his thunder and lightning might have reached the multitude, instead of being always only a sinister grumbling from the background of exile. Of all the hundred volumes of his work perhaps nothing will remain except that commanding gesture of an orator which Rodin has perpetuated in his statue, and which is nothing else than the will to move to passion. He has created this will to pathos, but not the pathos itself; still, even the effort is a great and memorable achievement.

Victor Hugo's inheritance, which was ill administered by chatterers and chauvinists, by Déroulède and such poets with their big drums and their trumpet-flourishes, has been taken over in France by Verhaeren. And he is the first whose voice again reaches the crowd, the first French realisation of a pathos which has absolutely the effect of art and poetry. He more than any other, he whose deepest delight it is to quell a grandiose resistance, he the *évocateur prodigieux*, as Bersaucourt [1] has called him, was entitled to the mastery of the living word. Whenever I read a poem by Verhaeren, I am time after time astonished to find myself, when I have begun by reading it to myself, suddenly forced to read the words aloud; surprised to find myself read-

[1] Albert de Bersaucourt, *Conférence sur Émile Verhaeren.*

ing them louder and louder; surprised to find in my hand, in my whole body, the urgent need awakening of the gesture that hails and kindles an audience. For so strong is the passionateness of the original feeling, the inner cry and appeal in the words, that it forces its way through the reproduction, rings out loudly even from the dead letters. *All the great poems of Verhaeren are filled with the yearning to be spoken aloud, vehemently, in the zest and glow of passion.* If they are recited softly, they seem to be quite without melody; if they are read calmly and stolidly, they often seem hard, uneven, and abrupt. Many images recur with a certain regularity, many adjectives are repeated as petrified ideas —the trick of an orator who emphasises what is important by standing expressions—but the moment the poem is read aloud it is all alive again, the repetitions are suddenly revealed as superb instances of excitement reaching its mark, the recurring images take their place as regular milestones along a road rushing along wildly to the infinite. Verhaeren's poetry is the communication of an ecstasy, communication not in the sense of a secret to an individual, but of fire cast to kindle a crowd. His poems never seem to be quite completed, but to have been first created while being read, just as every good and fiery speech gives the impression of being improvised; they are always the unfolding of a state, a passionate analysis that acts like a dis-

covery. They are moving, not harmonious. Just as an orator does not shock his audience at the very first with the conclusion of his reasoning, but pays out the chain of his arguments slowly and logically, Verhaeren builds his poems from visions, first in repose, then in the excitement that intensifies, and then with burning horizons foaming over more and more wildly in images. And these images again are rhetorical; they are not similes which can only be understood in their totality by the roundabout way of reflection; they are glaring flashes of lightning. A poem that would move those who hear it has need of metaphors which not only hit the mark of feeling, but which hit it immediately with deadly effect. They must be glaring, because they have to force the whole feeling in the expression of one second as quick as lightning. In this way the pathetic poem produces a new form of sensuous expression, and in this way too it creates itself a new rhythm of intensification. First of all, with the lightnings of his metaphors Verhaeren illuminates the vast landscape of visions; then, by a certain monotony of rhythm, he intensifies the astonishment and excitement to the highest ecstasy. Repeatedly, at the breathing-spaces of his great poems, you think you have reached the summit, only to be whipped to a higher leap, to a higher outlook. 'Il faut en tes élans te dépasser sans cesse';[1] this, his moral command-

[1] 'L'Impossible' (*Les Forces Tumultueuses*).

ment, is for him the highest poetical law as well. The deepest will of his pathetic poem is to whip up, to set running, to snatch his hearer along with him. 'Dites!' this summons which is like a gesture, the urgent 'encore, encore!' are appeals which in his poems are petrified into cries, just as every horseman has certain words to lure the last strength from his horse. *Such words are nothing but transposed oratorical gestures.* The hollow 'oh!' is the gesture of appeal; the short 'qu'importe!' the gesture as of one who casts away a burden grown too heavy; the slow, curving, far-sweeping 'immensément' is the heaping up of all infinity. These poems are lashed into fever heat. For not only do they themselves seek to fly like those other, the harmonious, the really lyric poems, which with wings outspread seem to hover near the clouds, they also seek to snatch up by force the whole heavy mass of the audience. This is the explanation of the constant repetitions in the poems, which are often very long, as though some last doubter were yet to be convinced, as though fire were to be darted into the blood of some last one yet immune. Everything strives forwards, forwards, dragging the resister along with ecstatic power.

And here are seen the dangers of pathos. The first danger, that into which, for instance, Victor Hugo fell, was the emptiness, the hollowness of the feeling, the covering over of a void by a mighty gesture; enthusiasm resulting from a de-

liberate method, and not forced by inner feeling. Empty phrasing is and remains the first danger of the pathetic poem. The triteness of words 'plus sonores que solides'[1] is the second. Here, however, in this new pathos, there is another and a new peril, that of the over-heating of feeling, that of excessive, unhealthy exaltation, which must then of necessity yield to exhaustion. No man can be in a constant fever of excitement, in an unremitting state of exaltation. And in these poems there is the will to unceasing ecstasy. By the pathos, too, the purely lyrical values of the poem often fall into danger. The will to be clear often forces the poet to a triteness of wording; the terseness necessitates frequent repetition; the impulse to build up an organic ecstasy often leads to excessive length. Owing to its glaring, clear colours the language loses that mystical element of lyric verse—the incommensurable, as Goethe called it—that magic hint of a secret thing fleeing from the crowd and the light of day. But at the same time this pathos signifies an immense enrichment of lyric resources, a transvaluation of the word, by the very fact that it is not exclusively intended for print but for declamation as well. The pathetic poem is not, like the lyric poem, a crystallised impression; it is not at the same time question and answer to itself; it is the expectation of an answer. The great pathos, therefore, grows with success, and involuntarily

[1] Albert Mockel, *Émile Verhaeren.*

mingles in the poem the craving and the answer of the poet's time. The voice of the poet is always as strong as the call that goes out to him. Verhaeren found this new pathos in the course of his development, because he no longer felt the voice of the crowd, of cities, and of all the new things as a hindrance to his lyric poetry, but as a challenge, as a rhetorical exhortation. And the more the world around us becomes ponderous, grandiose, and passionate—the more it becomes heroic in the concentration of its strength (heroic in that new strength that Emerson preached)—so much the more, too, must lyric poetry in the new sense, perhaps in Verhaeren's sense, be pathetic. Gigantic impressions cannot be forced into petty impressions; vast conceptions cannot be split up into mean fragments; a loud appeal needs a loud answer. All art is more dependent than we are aware on its epoch. The same secret dependence between demand and production seems to exist in the sphere of art as exists in commerce. Laws that escape our knowledge and cannot be prisoned in formulæ can sometimes be glimpsed, hazy as a presentiment, in fugitive intuition.

VERHAEREN'S POETIC METHOD

Je suis celle des surprises fécondes.
É. V., 'Celle des Voyages.'

A REAL poem must not exhibit an artificial structure of parts, a mechanism; it must, like man himself, be organic, an indissoluble union of soul and body. It must have a living body of flesh, the substance of the word, the colour of the metaphors, the mechanism of the motion, the skeleton of the thought; but over and above all that it must possess that inexpressible something, the soul, which alone makes it organic; the breath, the rhythm, that inseparable essence which is no longer perceptible to intelligence, but only to feeling. It is not first in this transcendental element, however, that the poet's personality is revealed: the poetry of a great poet must be characteristic in its very physis, in its very material. Side by side with that magic vibration, that intangible element of feeling, the materiality too, the weaving of the word, that net of expression in which the fugitive feeling is caught in the waters of the hidden life and lifted into the light, these too must be alone of their kind if they are to characterise the poet's race, environment, and personality. This purely material organism of

the poet too is, like every living thing, subject to growth, to the change of maturity and age. The structure of the poem, like every human face, must gradually, in the revolution of the years, work its way to character from the shifting features of childhood and the indistinctness of the general type, must in its sensuous externals, in the physiognomy of the material, show all psychic changes to the last acquisition of personality. In a real poet the technical aspect, the handicraft, the external element has a development that runs parallel to the intellectual and poetic contents. In form, too, the poem must at first represent a tradition, something that has been taken over; only in the revolt of youth will it achieve a personal form, and this itself will later, as it gradually grows cold and petrifies, represent an immutable type.

Verhaeren's poetry has its evolution and its history in this purely formal sense. Even this poetry of Verhaeren's, which to-day looms so immensely isolated and so victoriously characteristic in French literature that a connoisseur can, without a shadow of doubt, recognise the creator from a single stanza, has grown from a tradition, is the climax of a certain culture, and is at the same time related to a contemporary movement. When Verhaeren began to write, Victor Hugo, the crowned king of French lyric poetry, was dead; Baudelaire was forgotten; Paul Verlaine was still almost unknown. Victor

Hugo's heirs, who divided his kingdom as once the diadochi divided the kingdom of Alexander the Great, were only able to preserve the trappings of the glory gone, and the grandiloquence of their words contrasted ill with their thin voices and artificial feelings. Against this circle, against François Coppée, Catulle Mendès, Théodore de Banville and the rest of them, rose up a new school of young men who called themselves 'decadents and symbolists.' Here I must frankly admit that I am really unable to explain this idea, perhaps for the very reason that I have read so many varying definitions of it. The only thing that is certain is, that at that time a group of young writers rose up in concert against a tradition, and, in the most diverse experiments, sought a new lyrical expression. What this new thing consisted in would be hard to say. The truth is perhaps that all these poets were not French; that each of them brought some new element from his own country, his own race, his own past; that none of them felt that respect for the French tradition which was in the blood of the native poets as an inward barrier, and thus were able unconsciously to get nearer to their own artistic instinct. One only needs to look at the names, which often at the first glance betray the foreigner, the Americans Vielé-Griffin and Stuart Merrill, the Belgians Verhaeren, Maeterlinck, and Mockel, or which, as in the case of Jean Moréas, cover a complicated Greek name with

a French pseudonym. The only indisputable exploit of this group really was that about 1885 they quickened the pace of French lyric poetry with a new unrest. Mallarmé plunged his verses into a secret darkness of symbols, until the words with their subterranean meaning almost became unintelligible, while Verlaine gave his lines the dream-rapt lightsomeness of a music never heard before. Gustave Kahn and Jules Laforgue were the first who did away, the one with rhyme and the other with the Alexandrine, and introduced the apparent irregularities of the *vers libre*. Each one did his best on his own account to find something new, and all of them had in common the same fiery eagerness to attack the idols of a derivative poetry, the same ardent longing for a new form of expression. True, their talent was soon choked up with sand, but that was because they over-estimated the technical side of the innovations they introduced and spent themselves in the investigation of theories, instead of developing their own personalities. As time went on their paths diverged widely. Many of them foundered in the sea of journalism; others are still, after a lapse of twenty years, walking round in a circle in the footsteps of their youth; and of the symbolists and decadents nothing is left but a page or so of literary history, a faded sign-board marking an empty shop. Verhaeren too was classed with them, although in my view he was never essentially influenced by

this school. A man of such sturdy originality could not be more than stimulated by others, could not be more than confirmed in his natural tendency to revolt. His attitude with regard to the *vers libre* was by no means due to this influence. For it was not by suggestion from others, not by the instinct of imitation, but by inward necessity, that he discovered his new form. It was not the example of others that freed him from the fetters of tradition; he was forced to free himself from them of his own accord. This inner compulsion is alone of importance; for it is a matter of complete indifference whether a poet writes by chance in regular verse or in *vers libres*; the phenomenon can only be significant when a poet is of necessity and by inner pressure forced to free himself from tradition and to achieve a personal form.

It was as a Parnassian that Verhaeren began. His first poetical attempts, which he has never published, the verses he wrote at school and in his first years at the university, showed him hypnotised by the style of Lamartine and Victor Hugo. And even in the first two books he published, in *Les Flamandes* and *Les Moines*, there is not a single poem in which Verhaeren has gone beyond his models. His poem is indeed somewhat more mobile than the strict pattern of school exercises; it already shows slight traces of the cracks which at a later day will break the vessel to pieces. But this hint of insubordina-

tion was at that time necessitated more by the harshness and rebelliousness of the subject itself, by some stiffness or other in the turn of the phrase, which can only be explained by the fact of the poet's alien race. Even a foreigner can recognise that the verse is not rounded off, that the rhythm is not balanced with the natural inevitable sense of form that a man of Latin race would have, but that here a forceful will is with difficulty constraining a barbaric temperament to harmony. Through his French one can hear the massive language of his race, something of the unwieldy strength we have in our old German ballads. And what his name at the first glance betrayed—the foreigner—was to the finer ear of a native easily perceptible from his French alone.

The farther Verhaeren proceeded in his development—the nearer he got to his real nature—the more the inheritance of his race in him revolted against the shackles of tradition—so much the more intensive became the impression of the Teutonic element in his verse. After all, development is in most cases nothing more than the awakening in us of our buried past. The highest demand of the Parnassian school, *impassibilité*, an immovableness as of bronze, is the antithesis of his stormy temperament, which drives him along to a wild rhythm, not to harmony. Deep, guttural notes vibrate in his verses, and make the song of his vowels rough; the angularity, the masculinity, abruptness, and hardness

of his peasant's nature peer through everywhere. In addition to this, there is now the inner transformation. So long as Verhaeren's poetic tendency was merely pictorial, one that calmly and without excitement aimed at painting the passion of the Flemish people, the earnestness of monasteries, just so long did the Alexandrine best serve to divide the rhythmic waves of his inspiration and roll them along. But when his personal sympathy began to confuse the inner indifference of his first work, his verse became uneasy. The cracks in the Alexandrine became more and more perceptible; greater and greater in the poet grew his impatience of it and his desire to smash it. He is no longer satisfied with the *vers ternaire*, the verse of the Romanticists with its two cæsuras dividing the line into three parts of perfectly equal rhythm and weight; he takes the free Alexandrine introduced by Victor Hugo and develops it still further, makes it still more irregular. He gives the syllables a different quantity, a different sonority; they no longer rest, they rock to and fro. And gradually the earnest, immovable uniformity of accentuation is changed into a more billowing, rhythmic fluidity. But ere long this concession too becomes too trivial for him. A temperament so impetuous as his will endure no outward fetter whatever. For it is not repose that this fiery singer would describe, but his own excited state—the quivering and vibrating of his emotion, his febrile

unrest. His great manifold feeling, which is nothing else than a modulated cry, cannot storm itself out in regular verse ; it needs unquiet gestures, motion, freedom, the *vers libre*. The fact that at this time other poets in France were using the free verse, the fact that it was at that time—several dispute the priority—' invented ' for poets, is of no consequence to us here. Such contemporaneous incidences never express a chance, but always a latent necessity. Free verse was nothing else than the inevitable reflex action of modern feeling, the poetic breaking free of the unrest which lay in the time. Whether or not Verhaeren at that time had models is of no importance. What has been taken over can never become organic, only what comes from personal experience is a real gain. And at that time it lay quite in the line of his development that by inner necessity he was forced to break his old instrument and create himself a new one. For the nervous unrest, the passionate agitation of Verhaeren's later poems is unthinkable in regular verse. If verse is to describe in its own inner passion the immense multiplicity of modern impressions—their haste, their fire, their precipitous revulsion, their unexpectedness, their gloomy melancholy, and the overwhelming vastness of their dimensions—it must be strong and yet flexible, like a rapier. Such poems must be emancipated from rules : they must stride along like a real crowd, noisily seething ; they must

not walk in step, like soldiers on the march. And if they are to be spoken, they must not be recited in the stiff, cold, pathetically vibrating, self-conscious declamation of the Comédie Française; they must be spoken as though to a crowd; they must cry out, they must hail; and this whipping up of an audience cannot be harmonious. These poems must be spontaneous and impulsive.

Manifold is the diversity which Verhaeren's poetry has achieved by its deliverance from the monotony of the Alexandrine. Now and now only can the verse reproduce the plastic side of an impression and the inward agitation of it; not only by a pictorial description, but in a purely external manner too; by the sound, by the music of the rhythm. The lines, sometimes darting far beyond the margin, sometimes, like an arrow, sharpened to a single word, have the whole key-board of feeling. They can pace with a grave step like long black funeral processions, if haply they would express the monotony of solitude, 'Mes jours toujours plus lourds s'en vont roulant leur cours'; [1] they can dart up like a falcon, white and glittering, soaring to the exulting cry 'la joie,' swift and as high as heaven over all the sad heaviness of earth. All the voices of day and night can now be represented onomatopoetically: all that is brusque and sudden by brevity; all that is ponderous and grandiose by a vast sweep of fulness; an unexpected thing

[1] 'L'Heure Mauvaise' (*Au Bord de la Route*).

by sudden harshness; haste in a feverishly accelerated movement; savagery by a precipitous change of velocity. Every line can now express the feeling by its rhythm alone. And one might without knowing French recognise the poetical intention of many of these poems merely by listening to their consonantal music, nay, often by looking at their typographical arrangement.

For this reason I should be tempted to call these poems with their vast range *symphonic* poems. They seem to have been conceived for an orchestra. They are not, like the poetry of a past generation, chamber music; they are not solitary violin *soli*; they are an inspired blending of all instruments; they are graded in individual sections which have a different *tempo* and the pauses of the transitions. In Verhaeren's poetry the lyric exceeds the bounds of its domain and impinges on the dramatic and the epic. For his poem seeks not only to describe a mood, like a purely lyrical poem, it describes at the same time the birth of this mood. And this first part of the construction is epic; it is descriptive; it leads up from a lowly beginning to a great discharge of force. And, in the second place, the transitions are dramatic, those bursts of temperament from section to section, those precipitous falls and steep ascents which only at the end lead to a harmonious solution. From a purely external point of view Verhaeren's poem is more extensive, longer, of a greater range than any other

contemporary poetry; it shoots out farther beyond the limit of lyric poetry; and, careless of the boundary-line of æsthetics, it derives strength and nourishment from neighbouring domains. It comes nearer to rhetoric, nearer to epic poetry, nearer to the drama, nearer to philosophy than any other poetry of our day; it is more independent of set rules than poetry had been hitherto. And independent of rules—or obeying only a new inner rule—is Verhaeren's form. Now, since the page no longer holds the fettered lines together in equal columns, the poet can write out his wild, overflowing feelings in their own wild, boldly curving lines. Verhaeren's poem at this time—and that which is achieved in the years of maturity remains inalienable—has its own inner architectonics. But it can hardly be compared to a piece of architecture, a structure built with hands; it is rather like a manifestation of nature. It is elementary like every feeling; it discharges itself like a storm. First a vision moves up like a cloud; more and more densely it compresses itself; more and more sultrily, more and more oppressively it weighs on the feeling; higher and higher, hotter and hotter grows the inner tension, until at last in the lightning of the images, in the rolling of the rhythm, all the garnered strength discharges itself rhythmically. The andante always grows to a furioso; and only the last section shows again the clear, cleansed sky of calm, in an intellectual synthesis of

the state of chaos. This structure of Verhaeren's poem is almost invariable. It may be seen, for instance, in two parallel examples: in the poems 'La Foule' and 'Vers la Mer' in the book *Les Visages de la Vie*. Both set in with an adjuration, a vision. Here the crowd, its confusion, its strength; there a sensitive picture of the morning sea whose transparent tones remind one of Turner. Now the poet fires this still vision with his own passionateness. You see the crowd moving more and more restlessly, the waves surging more and more passionately; and ecstasy breaks out the moment the poet surrenders himself to these things, places himself among the crowd, sinks his feeling, his body in the sea. Then in the finale bursts forth the great cry of identity, in the one case the yearning to be all the crowd, in both that ecstatic gesture of the individual yearning for infinity. The first picture, which was only sensuously seen, grows at the end of the poem into a great ethic inspiration; from the vision is unfolded an unconquerable moral and metaphysical need. This form of intensification from individual feeling to universal feeling is the basic form of Verhaeren's poem. It might be best, in order to convey a clear idea of its form, to use a geometrical term and say that these poems are, to a certain extent, *poems in the form of a parabola*. While the lyric in the current sense mostly represents a symmetrical and harmonious form, a return to itself, a circle, Verhaeren's poem has the

form of a parabola, apparently irregular but really equally governed by a law. His poems soar in a swift sustained flight, soar from the earth up into the clouds, from the real to the unreal, and then from a sudden zenith fling themselves back to the earth. The inspiration drives the feeling away from the pictorial, from passionless contemplation to this utmost height of possibility, far away from all sensuous perceptions high into the metaphysical, in order then, suddenly and unexpectedly, to bring it back to the *terra firma* of reality. And indeed, in the music of these poems there is something as of a darting upwards, something of the hissing and whizzing of a stone well thrown and of its sudden falling down. In their rhythm too is this increasing velocity, this catching of the breath and this return to the starting-point, this bethinking itself of gravity when it returns to the earth.

Something may now be said as to the means with which Verhaeren attains his vision, with which he seeks to represent the inner passionateness of things, with which he evokes enthusiasm. Let us first of all try to establish whether Verhaeren is what is called a master of language. Verhaeren's command of language is not by any means unlimited. Both in his words and in his rhymes there is constant repetition which sometimes borders on monotony; but on the other hand there is a strangeness, a newness, an unexpectedness of wording which is almost unex-

ampled in French lyric poetry. An enrichment of the language, however, does not proceed from neologisms alone; a word may become alive by the unexpectedness of a new application, by a transposition of the meaning, as Rainer Maria Rilke, for instance, has often done in the German lyric. To redeem 'die armen Worte, die im Alltag darben,'[1] and consecrate them anew to poetry, is perhaps a higher merit than creating new words. Now Verhaeren has above all, by the Flemish sense of language which he inherited, imported a certain Belgian timbre into French lyric poetry. Personally, it is true, he is almost ignorant of Flemish; nevertheless, by the vague music familiar to him from his childhood's days, by a certain guttural tone, he has imported a nuance which is perhaps less perceptible to the foreigner than to a Frenchman. At this point I should like to call Maurice Gauchez as a witness and borrow the most salient examples from his extraordinarily interesting monograph. Among the neologisms for which Gauchez suggests a foreign origin he quotes the following: les baisers rouges, les plumes majuscules, les malades hiératiques, la statue textuelle, les automnes prismatiques, le soir tourbillonaire, les solitudes océans, le ciel dédalien, le cœur myriadaire de la foule, les automnes apostumes, les vents vermeils, les navires cavalcadeurs, les gloires médusaires.

[1] 'Poor words a-hungered in the working day.'—Rainer Maria Rilke, *Mir zur Feier*.

And he rightly points out how much certain of Verhaeren's verbs might enrich the French language: enturquoiser, rauquer, vacarmer, béquiller, s'enténébrer, se futiliser, se mesquiniser, larmer. But I for my part cannot look upon the enrichment here accruing from racial instinct as the essential thing in his verbal art: it only gives it a local colour, without really explaining what is astonishingly modern in his diction. Verhaeren has been a great creator of new things for the French lyric, above all by his extension of its range of subjects, by his renewal of poetic reality, by recruiting new forces for poetry in the domain of technical science. *The great part of the new blood for his language came not so much from Flemish as from science.* A man who writes poems on the Exchange, on the theatre, on science, who sings factories and railway stations, cannot ignore their terminology. He must borrow certain technical expressions from the vocabulary of science, certain pathological terms from medicine; he must extend the glossary of the poetic by the extension of the poetic itself. There are geographical surprises of rhyme to be found in Verhaeren: Berlin and Sakhalin, Moscow, the Balearic and other distant islands whose names have never previously lived in rhyme. And since science is by its own progress compelled to invent new names every day, since new machines demand new words for their necessities, here for the first time an inexhaustible

source has been discovered for replenishing the French language.

This immense wealth, on the other hand, is jeopardised by something that might be called not so much poverty or restriction as fascination. Every one-sidedness of feeling produces, with its advantages, certain defects, and thus the constant passionateness which brought Verhaeren's poetry near to oratory, to preaching, is at the same time responsible for a certain monotony of the metaphors. Verhaeren is hallucinated by certain words, images, adjectives, phrases. He repeats them incessantly through all his work. All things in which a many-headed passion is united he compares with a ' brasier ' ; ' carrefour ' is his symbol for indecision ; ' l'essor ' is for him the last straining of effort ; many cries and words by which he hails his audience are repeated almost from page to page. The adjectives too are often monotonous ; often indeed, with the cold ' iques ' at the end of them, they are schematic ; and even in the metaphors that phenomenon is unmistakable which in science is called pseudoanæsthesia, that is, the memory of a fixed feeling from the domain of some other sense is always individually associated with a certain colour or sound. For him ' red ' expresses all that is passionate ; ' gold ' all greatness and pomp ; ' white ' all that is gentle ; ' black ' all enmity. His images have thus something abrupt and absolute ; there is always

in them, as Albert Mockel has demonstrated in his masterly study, the decisive, the sudden excitement, which overwhelms our astonishment. His images are as violent as his colours, as his rhythm. They have the suddenness of a cannon-ball which darts through space and is only perceptible to our vision when it reaches its aim and smashes the target. Possibly the inmost reason of this lies in the fact that these poems are intended to be spoken. A placard that is to have effect at some distance must be in glaring colours ; pathos calls for images that hallucinate. Such images have indeed been found by Verhaeren, and by Verhaeren only. He hardly seems to know nuances. With the brutal instinct of a strong man he loves all that is glaring, all that is untrammelled. 'La couleur, elle est dans ses œuvres une surprise de métaux et d'images.' [1] But in this material they blaze, and with their lightnings they light up even the most distant horizon. I will only remind the reader of his 'beffrois immensément vêtus de nuit' or 'la façade paraît pleurer des lettres d'or,' or his 'les gestes de lumière des phares.' By the intensity of such images Verhaeren attains to quite an incomparable clearness of the feeling. 'Personne, je crois, ne possède à l'égal de Verhaeren le don des lumières et des ombres, non point fondues, mais enchevêtrees, des noirs absolus coupés de blanches clartés.' [2]

[1] Albert Mockel, *Émile Verhaeren.* [2] *Ibid.* (*Ibid.*).

One-sidedness of temperament here produces a one-sided advantage with all its artistic restrictions. So that Verhaeren is not a verbal artist in the unrestricted sense of one who always hits upon the only, the inevitable comparison for a thing; of one who flashes a bold word on the attention once and never retails it till it palls, who seems to use every word for the first time. His poetic vocabulary is rich, but by no means infinite; his sensibility is strong, but it has its restrictions. For, as is the case with every passionate poet, certain feelings at the last white-heat of excitement appear to him identical, seem to him to be capable of comparison only with the quite elementary things of Nature, with fire, the sea, the wind, thunder and lightning. To make the point clear, Verhaeren is not a verbal artist in Goethe's sense, but rather in Schiller's sense. With the latter, too, he has the gift in common of definitely expressing certain perceptions in one lyric line. He has discovered essences of the lyric feeling of life, lines that are now household words, or which at all events will be so. It will be sufficient to mention word formations such as 'les villes tentaculaires,' which in France have already become commonplaces, or such maxims as 'La vie est à monter et non à descendre,' or 'Toute la vie est dans l'essor.' In lines like these the lyric ecstasy is compressed as in a coin, and perpetuated in the current riches of the language.

This hardness and brutality, these abrupt transitions, constitute the individuality of Verhaeren's poetry. At bottom it is nothing else than an accentuated masculinity. The voice, the music, is guttural, deep, raucous, masculine; the body of his poem has, like a man's body, the beautiful movement of strength, but in repose gestures that are often hard and which only in passion regain their compelling beauty. Whereas French lyric poetry, so to speak, had imitated the female body, the delicate grace of its soft yielding lines; whereas its first concern was harmony; Verhaeren's poem strove only for the rhythm of movement, only for the proud and vigorously ringing stride of a man, his leaping and running, the fighting display of his strength. This is not the only reason why the French have so long repudiated him. For where we delight in an echo from the German in his language, they feel the harshness of the Teutonic undertone; where we find a consonance with the German ballad, a re-birth of the German ballad as though it were awakening from the dreams of childhood, they see an opposition to the native tradition. And in fact, the farther Verhaeren has proceeded in his development, both in his personality and in his verse, the more the French varnish has peeled off his Teutonic perception. It was only in the time of his first dependence on tradition that his poetry was hardly to be distinguished from that of other writers in French.

The farther he receded from the French standpoint, the more he unconsciously approached German art. To-day, perhaps, a return to classicism is perceptible in his poetry. The neologisms are not so audacious; the images are more schematic; the whole poem is calmer and more clarified. This, however, is by no means a cowardly compromise with a shattered tradition, no repentant return to the fold; it is the same phenomenon we meet in a similar manner in the late poems of Goethe, Schiller, Hugo, and Swinburne; the effect of the cooling of the blood in age; the yielding of sensuous perception to intellectual ideas. The victor has lost the fighter's brutality; the man in his maturity no longer needs revolt but a conception of the world—harmony. Here, as in Verhaeren's whole evolution, his verse is the most delicately sensitive indicator of the psychic revulsion, the perfect proof of a poetic and organic development which is really inward and dependent only on the laws of his blood.

VERHAEREN'S DRAMA

Toute la vie est dans l'essor.
É. V., *Les Forces Tumultueuses.*

Émile Verhaeren's dramas seem to stand outside his work. Verhaeren is essentially a lyric poet. His whole feeling springs from lyric enthusiasm, and all neighbouring domains are merely sources whose strength flows into and feeds this one vital instinct. Verhaeren has almost always used the dramatic and the epic only as a means, never as an end in themselves: from the epic he has taken over into the vast sweep of his dithyrambic poems its broad, calm development, and from the drama the swift, abrupt contrast of transitions. The dramatic and the epic only serve him as a tonic, as a means to strengthen the blood of his lyric art. Although Verhaeren beside his lyric work has written dramas—four up to the present—these, in the edifice of his complete production, must be appreciated from a different point of view: from an architectural point of view. For the dramas are to him, in a certain sense, only a survey, a concentration of individual lyric crises, a synopsis of certain ideal complexes which have occupied some moment of his past; they are final settle-

ments; the last point in lines of development; milestones of individual epochs. All that in the lyric poems, which never systematically bounded a domain, fell apart, is here made to converge to the focus of a programme. The lyric juxtaposition is fused into an inner relationship, the circle of ideas is co-ordinated like a picture in the frame of a play. Verhaeren's four tragedies represent four spheres of a conception of the universe: the religious, the social, the national, and the ethical. *Le Cloître* is a re-creation of the book of verse *Les Moines*, is the tragedy of Catholicism; *Les Aubes* is a condensation of the sociological trilogy *Les Villes Tentaculaires*, *Les Campagnes Hallucinées*, *Les Villages Illusoires*. *Philip II.* shapes the tragedy of the Antichrist, the contrast of Spain and Belgium, of sensuality and asceticism. And *Hélène de Sparte*, which in its outward form manifests a return to classicism, handles purely moral, eternal problems. As far as their contents are concerned, Verhaeren's dramas show no deviation, no change of the inner centre of gravity, and his new dramatic style is in perfect harmony with his new lyric style. For just as on the one hand he has used the dramatic element as a substance of his lyric work, here in his dramas he has transmuted the lyric element to a dramatic element. Here, too, we have nothing but visions intensified into exaltation. Here, as everywhere else, Verhaeren can only create by enthusiasm. What goads him on is

the lyric moment in his enthusiasm, that second of the highest tension when passion, if it is not to shatter the frame of its generator, must have explosive words. The characters of his dramas are never anything but symbols of great passions, the bridge for this ascension of the exaltation. To him the action is no more than the way to the crises, to those seconds when some mighty force seizes on these characters and forces them to cry out. Whole scenes seem to be only awaiting for the moment when some one shall rise and turn to the crowd, wrestle with it and overthrow it, or be himself dashed to pieces.

The style of Verhaeren's dramas is purely lyrical; the pace is throughout passionate and feverish; and this method, which runs counter to all dramatic canons, was bound organically to create a new technique. The French drama had hitherto known only the rhymed Alexandrine or prose. In Verhaeren's dramas—for the first time to my knowledge—prose and verse (verse which is 'free' both as regards rhythm and rhyme) are throughout promiscuously mixed. Mixed, but not as in Shakespeare, in whose plays verse and prose alternate in individual scenes and establish, so to speak, a social stratification, serving-men speaking in prose and their masters in verse: in Verhaeren the prose passages are the broad, resting foundations of the action; the curved bowls, so to speak, from which the holy fire of the exaltation flames. His characters

express their calm in prose, pass from calm to excitement, and in this intensification speak a language which imperceptibly merges into a poem. Not till their passion breaks out do they speak in verse, in those seconds, as it were, when their soul begins to vibrate; and in these passages one cannot help thinking of an aeroplane which is first driven along the ground and moves with ever greater speed till suddenly it soars aloft. In Verhaeren's drama the characters speak an ever purer language the more poetical they become; music breaks with their passion from their souls; just as many people who behave coarsely and awkwardly in ordinary life, in great moments suddenly achieve a bearing of heroic beauty. This embodies the idea that in enthusiasm a man discovers in himself another and a purer language; that passion and the yearning to free oneself from an immeasurable and intolerable earthly burden make a poet of any man. This idea is in harmony with Verhaeren's whole conception of the universe, his idea that the man swept away by passion and enthusiasm is on a higher plane than the critic with his lack of hot feeling; that receptivity for great sensations constitutes, so to speak, a scale of moral values. And the stage performances have shown that this new style is justified, that the transition from prose to verse, occurring as it does contemporaneously with the ascension from calm to passion, passes practically unnoticed by the audience,

which is equivalent to saying that when put to the test the method was recognised as necessary.

And it is by passion, this innermost flame of Verhaeren's poetry, that his dramas live too. Their qualities are those of the lyrics; they have, above all, that vast power of vision which sets *Philip II.* against the tragic landscape of Spain; over the drama of Helen arches the heaven of Greece, blue, and mild, and open like a flower; and behind the tragedy of modern cities unrolls the inflamed scenery of the sky with the black arms of chimneys. And then the immense fervour of the ecstasy which, not in a slow, regular progression, but in savage, convulsive thrusts, whirls the action onward to the moments of the solution.

Thus Verhaeren's first drama derives its strength from the lyric source of a man's accusation of himself. *Le Cloître* is a paraphrase of *Les Moines*, the book of the monks. Here again all the characters are gathered together in the cool corridors of a monastery—the gentle, the wild, the feudal, the wrathful, the childlike, the learned monk; here, however, they do not act in isolation, but with all their strength the one against the other. They fight for the prior's chair, which is really the symbol of something higher. For just as in *Les Moines* every individual monk expressed symbolically some virtue of Catholicism and a distinct idea of God, here the prior's chair decides the question who is the most deserving of God.

For his successor the old prior has designated Balthasar, a nobleman whom the monastery has sheltered for years. But he had only taken refuge there because he had killed his own father, thus escaping secular justice, and now he feels the consciousness of his guilt burning, feels the exasperated struggle between his own conscience and the lighter conscience of the others, who have long since forgiven him. And he cannot feel himself free before he has made his confession before the assembled monks, and even then only when he has repeated the confession, against the will of the monastery, to the people, and surrendered himself to the secular judges. The Roman Catholic idea of confession is here wonderfully in agreement with Dostoieffsky's conception of salvation by confession, of deliverance by suffering self-imposed. In three climaxes of equal force at the end of each of the three acts the tragic confession bursts into flame—first born of fear, then of a sense of justice, and at the last positively conceived as a pleasure; and here in these superb lyric ecstasies rest the strong pinions which bear the tragedy.

In the second, the social tragedy *Les Aubes*, the scenario is the present time. It has the purple scenery of *Les Villes Tentaculaires*, of the cities with the arms of polypi, which drain the blood of the poor dying country. Beggars, paupers, those who are starving, those who have been evicted, march to Oppidomagnum, the

modern industrial city, and besiege it. It is the past once again storming the future. In the lyrical trilogy this struggle had been shaped in a hundred visionary instances; here, however, the bright sky of reconciliation is arched above the battle-field, over the realities hovers the dream. For here the future joins hands with the present. The great tribune, Hérénien, breaks the backbone of this battle and shows himself the hero of a new morality by secretly admitting the enemy into the city—in the old sense the action of a traitor—by yielding and thus transforming the struggle into a reconciliation. He is the tragic bearer of the moral idea that enmity may be overcome by goodness, and he falls as the first martyr of his faith. Verhaeren's social conception, his superb description of realities, here merge slowly in a Utopia; the dawns of the new days begin to shine above the pasts that are dead; the din of rebellion fades away in harmony. This drama, like the others, is far remote from the possibilities of the majority of theatres, because of the fact that here too an ethical idea is expressed with all the glow and ecstasy which as a rule in modern dramas is only found in the utterance of erotic desire.

The third tragedy, *Philip II.*, is a national drama, although its scene is not laid in Flanders. Much as Charles de Coster in his *Thyl Ulenspiegel* had, with a Fleming's deadly hatred, seen in Philip II. the hereditary enemy of liberty, Ver-

haeren, who with the lyric poetry of his *Toute la Flandre* became the representative singer of his native land, painted this gloomy figure with hatred. Philip II. is here, as in *Thyl Ulenspiegel*, the hard, inflexible king who would fain put life out because it burns too red for him, who wishes to have the world as cool and marble-like as the chambers of the Escorial. Here of a sudden the reverse side of Roman Catholicism, whose passion was immortalised in *Le Cloître*, is rent open; its pitilessness and asceticism; its obstinate effort to overthrow the irrefragable joy of life. Don Carlos, however, is the fervent friend of the people, the friend of Flanders; he is the will to enjoyment, to merry moods, to passion. And this struggle between the 'yes' and the 'no' of life, this fight of Verhaeren's own lyric crisis, this fight between the denial and the passionate approval of enjoyment—at bottom, too, the deepest cause of the war between Spain and the Netherlands—is here symbolised in characters. Of course, any comparison with Schiller's *Don Carlos* must tell against Verhaeren, for the German drama is far more dramatic and conceived on a scale of greater magnificence; but Verhaeren did not aim at a complete rounding off, at a plenitude of characters; all that he wanted was to show these two feelings in their struggle with each other, the enthusiasm of life and its suppression by force. A comparison with Schiller's drama best shows Verhaeren's

disregard of dramatic canons, and at the same time the immense new lyric power of the play. For Spain is here seen with a strength and intensity of vision which is probably without a parallel in tragedy. The cold, hypocritical atmosphere can be felt; and better than from words the character of Philip can be perceived in that one silent scene in which he suddenly appears stealthily creeping to watch his son in the arms of the countess, and then, without a gleam in his rigid eyes, without the slightest movement of anger, vanishes again into the dark. Behind him, however, behind the spy and the eavesdropper, glides another shadow, the monk of the Inquisition: the eavesdropper is himself shadowed, the ruler is himself ruled. Visions like these, with the ecstasy of certain scenes, are the strongest motive power in Verhaeren's poetic construction. His dramatic art, like the art of his lyrics, does not rise in a steady ascent, but in sudden wild leaps and starts.

Only in his last drama, *Hélène de Sparte*, has Verhaeren come nearer to the accepted conception of the dramatic. That is characteristic of his organic development. For now that he is in the years when passion of necessity cools, harmony grows dear to him; and he who through all the years of his youth and prime was a revolutionary, now recognises the necessity of inner laws. By its mere intellectual substance this tragedy expresses the veering round: it is nothing else

than the longing from passion to harmony, Helen's flight from adventures to repose. And the return is to be found again in the verse, for Verhaeren here for the first time takes up the traditional French metre; his form, though yet free, approaches the Alexandrine. The tragedy of Helen is the tragedy of beauty. Helen is one of those antique characters who in Greek literature were only sketched in fleeting lines, characters whom a modern poet is now entitled to fill in with his own fate. For from the Greek sources we really knew nothing about her personal fate; we only knew the effect she exercised, only the reflection of her personality on others, not that of others on her. She was the queen who inflamed all men; who was the cause of great wars; the woman for whose sake murder on murder was committed; who was snatched from one bed to another; for love of whom Achilles arose from the dead; who passed her life circled by disastrous passion. But whether she herself shared these passions, whether she grew by them or suffered by them, the poets tell us nothing. Verhaeren in his drama has now attempted to depict the tragedy of the woman who endures fearful suffering because she is always desired in lust and no more; who is consumed by the torture of being ever robbed from lover by lover; of never knowing the look of pure eyes, calm converse, quiet breathing; who is cursed always to stand at the pyre of passion, with the flames

of men always blazing round her. Whoever looks at her at once desires her, snatches her; none waits and asks whether he serves her will; she is robbed like a chattel; she glides from hand to hand. In Verhaeren's drama Helen has returned home, a woman tired, tired of all unrest, of all her triumphs, tired of love; a woman hating her own beauty because it creates unrest, longing for nothing but old age, when none shall desire her more and her days shall be calm. Menelaus has brought her home, rescued her from all that stifling steam of criminal passion; now she would breathe quietly, live calm days, and be faithful to him. She desires no more than this. No passion can tempt her more. 'I have seen the flaring of so many flames that now I love only the hearth's glow and the lamp' is the expression of her poignant resignation. But fate will not yet let her go. Verhaeren has here seized on the great idea of the Greeks that everything that is superhuman on earth, every excessive gift, even that of beauty, is pursued as a hybrid by the envy of the gods, and must be paid for with pain. Too great beauty is no profit, but a tragic gift. And hardly has Helen returned, to rest and be happy, to be like everybody else, than new clouds roll themselves up above her head. Her own brother desires her; her enemy Electra desires her; her husband is murdered for her sake; and the old fearful battle threatens to break out anew for the possession

of her body. Now she flees, away from men, out into nature. And here again, with the vision of genius, Verhaeren approaches Greek feeling. The forest is not dead to him, but animate; life does not stop at human beings; fauns emerge from the bushes, naiads from the rivers, bacchantes from the mountains, and all swarm round Helen in her despair, luring her to their lust, till she flees to Zeus in death.

It is characteristic of Verhaeren that he has made even this tragedy, the tragedy of Helen, anerotic, or better anti-erotic. Perhaps the slight interest which has hitherto been manifested in Verhaeren's dramas, and indeed partly in his whole work, may be ascribed to the fact that, in comparison with the other poets of his day, he has held himself aloof from erotic subjects, that the problem of love has only recently, in the years of his maturity, begun to interest him as a theme for his art. From the first Verhaeren concentrated all the passion which others lavished on the erotic in purely intellectual things, in enthusiasm, in admiration. In his dramas woman plays an almost subordinate rôle, and *Le Cloître* is perhaps the only important drama of our days which does not show a single woman among its characters and in its inner circle of problems. By this fact alone his dramatic aim strays too far from the interests of our public. For it is from a purely intellectual conflict that Verhaeren seeks to disengage that height and

heat of passion which hitherto was known only in erotic themes; and therefore the exaltation strikes the majority of an audience as strange, and leaves them unmoved. All our contemporaries who seek art only in the theatre are too indifferent and timid to be snatched up, for a purely ethical problem, into an ecstasy so burning, so persistently lit with convulsive lightnings. This is the only explanation I can find for the opposition to Verhaeren's dramas, which are so full of beauty and of living, dramatic, passionate situations, and which, above all, contain something new, a new dramatic style. This very kindling of prose to verse was a revelation. But the whole dramatic aim is different in Verhaeren to that which obtains on the stage of to-day. His aim is not to excite interest, not to produce fear and compassion, but enthusiasm. He does not wish to occupy the minds of his audience, but to carry them away into his rhythm. He wishes to make them drunk with his great excitement, because only he who gazes in enthusiasm is capable of recognising these supreme passions; he wishes to make the spectators as feverish as the characters they see before them on the stage; he wishes to make their blood fiery; wishes to raise them above all cool, calm, and critical contemplation. His whole temperament, which drives along in the direction of superabundance; his art, which only fulfils its purpose in ecstasy; require impassioned actors and an impassioned

audience. To create the ideal atmosphere which Verhaeren demands for his dramas would require an actor of kindred genius who should have no fear of being called emotional, and who would hurl the verses down like cataracts, emphasising like a demagogue and at the same time unfolding all the magnificence of the rhythm. For the poet asks for nothing save a feeling of enthusiasm corresponding to that which first created the poem in him. His intention is not to convince by logic, not to dazzle by pictures, but to whip up and carry along with him into that ultimate dizzy feeling which to him is alone identical with the highest form of the feeling of life—into passion.

In Germany *Le Cloître*,[1] as staged by Max Reinhardt, and again in the Deutsches Volkstheater in Vienna, has conquered the interest of a literary public and triumphed unreservedly over the obstacle of its own strangeness. There has been an exemplary production of *Philip II.* in the Munich Künstlertheater ; *Hélène de Sparte* on the other hand has not yet found the setting it demands. As bodied forth in Paris by Ida Rubinstein, with decorations of a grandiose barbarism by Bakst, with a ground-colouring of music, it was effective more by the external magnificence of this somewhat sensationally advertised *mise en scène* than by its poetic qualities,

[1] A version of *Le Cloître*, by Mr. Osman Edwards, was successfully produced by Miss Horniman at the Gaiety Theatre in Manchester in 1910.

smothered as they were by the accessories. A production which shall do justice to the play, leaving its pure lyric line unbedizened with glaring arabesques, is still waiting as a task for some actor-manager of genius who possesses that highest and rarest quality of being able to subordinate himself to the utterance, who is anxious not to ruin a noble simplicity by a spurious plenitude.

PART III

COMPLETING FORCES

LES VISAGES DE LA VIE — LES FORCES TUMULTUEUSES — LA MULTIPLE SPLENDEUR — TOUTE LA FLANDRE — LES HEURES CLAIRES — LES HEURES D'APRÈS-MIDI — LES HEURES DU SOIR — LES RYTHMES SOUVERAINS — LES BLÉS MOUVANTS

1900-1914

COSMIC POETRY

. . . Les vols
Vers la beauté toujours plus claire et plus certaine.
É. V., ' Les Spectacles.'

THE poetic conquest of life represents, as it were, a process of combustion. Every poet feeds the flame of his inner being, his artistic passion, with the things of the world around him, transmutes them into flame, and himself shoots on high and dies down with them. The more the flame cools with the feebler circulation of the blood, the weaker grows this fire, and gradually the pure crystals, the residue from this battle of the inner flame with the things of reality, are separated from this process of combustion. Verhaeren's work was in his youth and prime a flame exceedingly hot, lawless, free, and flaring like the very years of his youth and prime. Now, however, in the work of his fifties, now that passion has cooled, the yearning is revealed to find the goal of this passion, the inherent lawfulness of this unrest. Enthusiasm for the present, poetic consumption of the world in visions without the residue of philosophy and logical knowledge, no longer suffice him. For all deeper contemplation of the present is unthinkable without an exceed-

ing of its limits : all that is, is at the same time something that has been and something that will be. Nothing is so entirely the present that it is not intimately connected with the past and the future. The eternal and the permanent is the inward side of all phenomena. And the more the poet turns his visions from the exterior, from the pictorial, to the inner world, to psychology, the more he descends from external phenomena to the roots of forces, the more he must apprehend the permanent behind the transitoriness of things. No perception of a contemporary state is fertile unless it is impregnated with the perception of laws that are independent of time, unless the changing phenomena are recognised as transformations of the unchangeable primordial phenomenon. This transition from maturity to age, from contemplation to knowledge, corresponds to a new artistic transition in the incomparably organic development of this poet. A transition : no longer a re-formation, but a formation which moves both forwards and backwards, which is at the same time an evolution and a retrogression, just as the poetic form of Verhaeren's poetry no longer undergoes a transformation, but is petrified. What a man has acquired in the years of his prime is an inalienable possession ; its value can be further increased only by knowledge, by the appraising of the possession. It may be said that a man who has passed his prime experiences nothing new : the static equilibrium is realised ;

what has been experienced is only the better understood. The experience is no longer a struggle, no longer a state of unrest, something that slips away ; it is a possession. What passion has fought for and won with a leap is now set in order and appraised at its true value by calm. This transition from youth to age is in Verhaeren, to use Nietzsche's phrase, a transition from the Dionysiac to the Apollinarian, from a plethora to harmony. His yearning is now *vivre ardent et clair*, to live passionately, but at the same time clearly to preserve his inner fire, but at the same time to lose his unrest. Verhaeren's books in these years grow more and more crystalline ; the fire in them no longer blazes openly like a flaring pyre, but glitters and sparkles as with the thousand facets of a precious stone. The smoke and the unrest of the fire die down, and now the pure residues are clarified. Visions have become ideas, the wrestling earthly energies are now eternal immutable laws.

The will of these last years, of these last works, is the will to realise a cosmic poem. In the trilogy of the cities Verhaeren had laid hold on the universe as it lies around us to-day ; he had snatched it to him and overcome it. In passionate visions he had shaped its image, achieved its form, and now it stood beside the actual world as his own. But a poet who would create the whole world for himself, the whole infinite vista of its possibilities by the side of its actualities, must give it every-

thing: not only its form, not only its face, but its soul as well, its organism, its origin, and its evolution. He must not merely apprehend its pictorial aspect and its mechanical energy, he must give it an encyclopædic form. He must create a mythology for it, a new morality, a new history, a new system of dynamics, a new system of ethics. Above it or in it he must place a God who acts and transforms. He must fashion it in his poetry not only as something that is, not only as something in the present, but as something that has been and is becoming, something that is part and parcel of the past and of the future too. It must ring out the old and ring in the new. And this will to create a cosmic poem is to be found in Verhaeren's new and most precious books—*Les Visages de la Vie*, *Les Forces Tumultueuses*, *La Multiple Splendeur*, *Les Rythmes Souverains*—books which by their mere title announce the effort to include the dome of heaven in their vast embrace. They are the pillars of a mighty structure, the great stanzas of the cosmic poem. They are no longer a conversation of the poet with himself and contemporary feeling; they are a pronouncement addressed to all the ages. *S'élancer vers l'avenir* is the longing they express: a turning away from all the pasts to speak to the future. The lyric element in them steps beyond the boundary-line of poetry. It kindles the neighbouring domains of philosophy and religion, kindles them to new possibilities. For not only

æsthetically would Verhaeren come to an understanding with realities; not by poetry only would he overcome the new possibilities; he would fain master them morally and religiously as well. The task of these last and most important books of verse is no longer to apprehend the universe in individual phenomena, but to impress its new form on a new law. In *Les Visages de la Vie* Verhaeren has in individual poems glorified the eternal forces, gentleness, joy, strength, activity, enthusiasm; in *Les Forces Tumultueuses* the mysterious dynamics of union shining through all forms of the real; in *La Multiple Splendeur* the ethics of admiration, the joyous relationship of man with things and with himself; and in *Les Rythmes Souverains* he has celebrated the most illustrious heroes of his ideals. For life has long since ceased to be for him mere gazing and contemplation:

> Car vivre, c'est prendre et donner avec liesse
> . . . . . avide et haletant
> Devant la vie intense et sa rouge sagesse ![1]

Description, poetic analysis, has gradually grown into a hymn, into 'laudi del cielo, del mare, del mondo,' into songs of the whole world and of the ego, and of the harmony of the world's beauty in its union with the ego. The lyrical has here become cosmic feeling, knowledge has become ecstasy. Over and above the knowledge that there cannot be anything isolated, that every-

[1] 'Un Soir' (*Les Forces Tumultueuses*).

thing is arranged and obeys the last uniform law of the universe, over and above this knowledge rises something still higher—over the contemplation of the world rises faith in the feeling of the world. The glorious optimism of these works ends in the religious confidence that all contrasts will be harmonised; that man will more and more be conscious of the earth; that every individual must discover his own law of the world in himself, the law that makes it possible for him to apprehend everything lyrically, with enthusiasm, with joy.

Here Verhaeren's poetry far exceeds the boundary-line of literature; it becomes philosophy and it becomes religion. Verhaeren was from the very first an eminently religious man. In his childhood Catholicism was the deepest feeling of his life, but this Catholicism had perished in the crises of his adolescence, his religious feeling had given way to the rapt contemplation of all new things, to ecstasy inspired by the aspect of life. But now, when Verhaeren returns to the metaphysical, the old yearning is reawakened. The old gods are dead for him; Pan is dead, and Christ too. Now he feels the need of finding a new faith, a new certainty, a new God for the new sensation, this identity of I and world. The new conflicts have created a longing in him for a new equilibrium; his stormily religious feeling, determined to believe, needs new cognition. The image of the world would be incomplete without

the God who rules it. All his yearning goes out to this God, and it finds its fulfilment. And this knowledge gives him the highest joy life can have, the loftiest pride life can bestow :

> Voici l'heure qui bout de sang et de jeunesse.
> . . . . . .
> Un vaste espoir, venu de l'inconnu, déplace
> L'équilibre ancien dont les âmes sont lasses ;
> La nature paraît sculpter
> Un visage nouveau à son éternité.[1]

To chisel this new face of God is the aim of his last and most mature works, in which the obstinate 'no' of his youth has become the loud exulting 'yes' of life, in which the great possibilities of old have become an unsuspected opulent reality.

[1] 'La Foule' (*Les Visages de la Vie*).

THE LYRIC UNIVERSE

Il faut aimer, pour découvrir avec génie.
É. V., 'Un Soir.'

If one is to understand Verhaeren's lyric work as a work of art, it must be kept in mind that he is a lyric poet, and a lyric poet only. A lyric poet only, not, however, in the limited sense of one who confines himself to the writing of lyric poems, but of one who, in a lofty and more extensive meaning of the term, transforms everything into emotion, who stands in a lyric relationship with all things, with the whole world. And since the innermost constitution of a man's talent unconsciously acts as the driving tendency, the direction of the aim of his life, his very fate and his conception of the world, since all this is so, the lyric poet that Verhaeren is must of necessity have a lyrical conception of the world, his cosmic feeling *must* be lyrical. To say that he has confined himself to the lyric style would be to diminish his stature. It is true that in all Verhaeren's imaginative work—and it is of considerable volume—there is no prose. A very thin volume of short stories did indeed appear many years ago and has long been out of print; but how tentative and provisional it was in scope

may be seen from the fact that Verhaeren later on turned one of the stories, that of the bell-ringer in the burning tower, into a poem. And I might mention a whole series of poems which at bottom are nothing but short stories, and others again which are saturated with dramatic excitement, quite unlyrical problems, but all of them lyrically conceived. And even in his criticism of art and in that penetrating and beautiful book of his on Rembrandt, in which he represents the organic connection of the artist with his native province almost as a personal experience, the outstanding passages live by their lyric enthusiasm. Many of the poems again are spiritualised theories of art. The origin of language or the sociological problem of emigration, the economic contrast of agrarianism and industrialism : in an essay such things might be calmly treated, coldly passed in review. But this is characteristic of Verhaeren, that he is unable to take a cold, faint interest in anything : consciously or unconsciously he must be carried away by enthusiasm for the things he contemplates. The ecstasy of his excitement involuntarily whips him out of a slow trot into lyric fervour. Poetry is to him, like his philosophy, like his ethics, a lyrical soaring. It is characteristic of the great lyric poets, of Walt Whitman, Dehmel, Carducci, Rilke, Stefan George, that at a certain height of their artistry they renounce all other than lyric forms. Here, as elsewhere, great things only seem possible of

attainment by concentration, only by the poet's freeing himself from the trammels of all other experiments. Great lyric poetry as the art of a life only accrues from the renunciation of all other forms of poetry.

Infinite enthusiasm, *le lyrisme universel*, a rapt visionary sensation of the earth rolling as it were in an eternal vibration through the cosmos, is the aim of Verhaeren's work. Not to describe the world in isolated poems, not to break it up in impressions, but to feel it as itself a flaring, flaming poem, *not to be one who contemplates the world, but one who feels it*, this is his highest yearning. A lyric art can only grow to such intentions as these from emotions not felt by other lyrists. It is not, as with most poets, from gentle crepuscular feelings, from vague states of melancholy, that such an impulse is crystallised to lyrical expression; here it is an overflowing fulness of feeling, a bright joy in life, that engenders his poem; an explosion which in the days of his debility was a paroxysm, which as time went on changed to a pure enthusiasm, but which was always an eruption of strength. Lyric art is here a discharge of the whole feeling of life. With Verhaeren the excitement does not sting the individual nerve; it spreads electrically, inflames the blood, contracts the muscles, produces an immense pressure, and then discharges the whole energy of a body saturated with health and strength. *The will to discharge strength is*

the basic form of Verhaeren's lyric emotion. His aim is to instil inspiration—first of all into himself (since inspiration always represents a higher state of ecstasy), and then into others. His lyric art is above all a launching of himself into exaltation, 'le pouvoir magique de s'hypnotiser soi-même.' [1] He talks himself into passion, gives himself that impulsion which then bears others along with him. It is not a lack, a privation, not a complaint or a wish that his work expresses; it is a plethora, a superfluity of riches, a pressure. It is not a warding off of life but an eternal leaping at it. His poetry has not the modest longing of music to lure to reveries; it does not, like painting, seek to represent something: it would act like fiery wine; it would make all feelings strong and glowing, sink all hindrances, produce that sensation of lightness, of blessedness, that quivering intoxication which conquers all the heaviness of earth. His intention is to produce this state of drunkenness, 'non seulement la glorification de la nature mais la glorification même d'une vision intérieure.' And his attitude is not plaintive or defensive, it is the great spirited attitude of a hand raised and pointing out, 'regardez!' the adjuring attitude, 'dites!' or one that fires and animates, 'en avant!' but it is always a gesture from the poet's self towards something, always a swinging of his arms away from himself into the universe,

[1] Albert Mockel, *Émile Verhaeren.*

always a pressing forward, a snatching away of himself from matter. And any one who really feels these poems feels, when the last line is read, that his blood is beating faster, feels that his body calls for exercise, feels the inspiration impelling him to action. *And this is the highest intention of Verhaeren's lyrical poetry, to animate, to quicken the blood, to fire the heart, to intensify vitality, to increase tenfold the sensation of life.*

But not only in this basic emotion is Verhaeren sundered from all those other poets who fashion their verses from sadness, sickly longing, amorousness, and melancholy. Verhaeren's lyric poetry breathes in other realms, in another atmosphere. Verhaeren is what I should like to call a poet of the daylight, of the open air. If you peruse the lyric works of contemporary poets you will find that their moods mostly arise from states of dusk and darkness. Since they have only the power of reproducing blurred outlines, they are fond of landscapes softened by twilight; of night, when there is no hardness in things, when what they see meets them half-way, already shaping itself into verse. Like Tristan, they hate the day as the destroyer of poetry, and swathe themselves in the trembling chiaroscuro of twilight. But the really great lyric poets have always been poets of the daylight; poets of the day and of the light, as the Greeks were, to whom all things that were bathed in sun spoke of beauty and cheerfulness; poets of the day, as Walt

Whitman was, the American; as all strong men have been who were filled with the zest of life. In Germany we have Dehmel to love, one of the few who have the courage to look right into the shining face of things without the fear of being blinded. But Verhaeren loves things the more the more intensive and decided they are, the more dazzling they are, the more their glaring colours clash. He does not surprise things when they are asleep, when they are resting and are helpless and at the mercy of poetry; he pounces on them when they are wideawake and can defend themselves with all their hardness from the attacks of their lyric lover. He loves the day, which places things side by side in harsh contrast; he loves the light, because it stimulates the blood; the rain that lashes the body; the wind that whips the skin; cold, noise, he loves everything that really and vehemently forces in upon him, everything that forces him to fight. He loves hard things more than soft and rounded things; loves that characteristic, black, and gloomy city Toledo more than golden, dreamy Florence; he loves the wind and the weather of frowning, tragic landscapes; he even loves noisy and thunderous cities pregnant with smoke and choking air. His nerves are not so morbidly sensitive that they respond to the least suggestion, the feeblest touch, and then stand impotent, fainting, when they are faced by the impetuous stimulants of robust life; his

nerves are—not dull, but healthy. They respond strongly to whatever lays hold of them strongly. If the other poets are like supersensitive beings who are excited by every trifle and lose their self-control when really great demands are made upon them, Verhaeren is like one who is hard to irritate, but who, if he is really stung, strikes out with his fists. *And Verhaeren does not love the poetical things that come to meet one already clothed in beauty; he loves those that have first to be wrestled with and overcome. Herein lies the exceeding masculinity of his art.* No one could ever surmise, in reading a poem of Verhaeren's, that it was the work of a woman. And as a matter of fact Verhaeren has not yet found an audience among women. For he is not one who moans and begs for pity; he is no passive poet, but a fighter, one who wrestles with all strong, wild, and living things until they yield up to him their innermost beauty.

And this struggle for the lyric mastery of individual sensations gradually becomes a struggle for all things, for the whole world. For Verhaeren does not wish to conceive of anything as unlyrical; does not wish to blow lyric fragments off the immense mass of reality; he wishes to sculpture it into a new shape; wishes to chisel the whole world into a lyric. And this is the secret of his lyric work; *this* is his work, his task. Of a sudden we feel the distance between him and the majority of lyric poets. *They* have the

feelings of people who receive gifts; they regard the sensations which come fluttering towards them as so many gay butterflies, capture them, and pin them down. Verhaeren, however, is the fighter, the worker, who is constrained to conquer everything, to shape the whole world anew, to rebuild it nearer to his heart's enthusiasm. He is the lyric poet pictured by Carducci in an imperishable poem—not the idler gazing into empty space; not the gardener decking the paths that his lady's feet must tread, and gathering frail violets for her bosom.

> Il poeta è un grande artiere,
> Che al mestiere
> Fece i muscoli d'acciaio,
> Capo ha fier, collo robusto,
> Nudo il busto,
> Duro il braccio, e l'occhio gaio.

And that 'picchia, picchia,' that rhythm of Carducci's, that beat of the bronze hammer of toil, rings in the measure of his verses. All his poems have been toiled for, fought for; they are a trophy, a meed of victory; nothing is a lucky gift. Verhaeren's manuscripts look like a battlefield. For he is not a poet who, in Goethe's sense, composes poems for particular occasions; he is never overpowered by a sudden chance idea: he transforms a problem of life, an actuality, or an intellectual phase into a lyric mood. After he has molten the poetic idea in his passion to a white heat, he hammers it into a poem by his rhythm.

His works are complexes: individual ideas attract him; he sets a hedge round their poetical field, ploughs it, scatters the seed in it, and never returns to the scene. What he has once achieved has no longer any attraction for him. To him poetry is always a fight, always work, always a plan. The layman who would fain look upon a lyric poem as a gift fallen from heaven will perhaps have no liking for this conscious method; an artist, on the other hand, will recognise in it the strength of a wise restraint, concentration on one aim, the will to compose not a lyric poem but a lyric work. A poetic work like that of Verhaeren, the work of a life, is not created by chance feeling alone, and not by enthusiasm. Such a work of art has, like a drama, its intellectual laws, the conquering and distributing powers of the intelligence, instinct, and above all that unifying will which suffers no dead points, no gaps, no stains in the work. And it is from such a vast lyric will that this work has arisen. Verhaeren is no favoured child of fortune, dowered with art in his cradle; his blood is heavy, Teutonic blood; and, fortunately, that ease and suppleness of the artisan which in all departments of labour produces a ready mediocrity was as much wanting in him as all physical skill. Verhaeren's poetic work, his form, his rhythm, his idea, his philosophy, his architectonics, all this is something he has acquired by labour, something he has painfully produced by passion and an obstinate

will; but for that very reason it is something organic. For Verhaeren is one of those who learn slowly, persistently, and surely, only from their own experience and never from others, but who never forget and lose what they have once acquired; one of those who grow as the things of Nature do, as trees grow into their strength ring by ring, and rise year by year higher above the earth to gaze farther and farther out beyond the horizons and nearer and nearer into the heavens.

And just for this reason, because this evolution was so persistent, because it was so wholly based upon experience, is the ascending line in his work so harmonious and so organic. No other lyric work of our days is so much a symbol of the seasons, so much a mirror of human periodicity. The revolt of spring, the sultriness of summer, the fruitage of autumn, and the cool clearness of winter gently merge in it, the one into the other. In his first books, at an age when many precocious poets have finished their development, he was still wrestling for his new form, for his expression. Nor did he at that time soon arrive at the heart of things; he remained for a long time absorbed in the purely picturesque contemplation of their external aspects. Then he attempted experiments, and freed himself in revolution. But in his beginnings he was always a student, an experimenter. In his second period, having really penetrated

below the surface, he found his own form, like every master, and subdued the internal with the external. But now that material is conquered, he that was a student and is now a master will of necessity be a teacher, and feel impelled to deduce forces from phenomena, laws from forces, the eternal from the earthly. From vacant contemplation he had risen to passionate creation, to active creation of art. The supreme creation of art has ever been the converting of the unconscious into consciousness, the recognition and knowledge of the laws of art; from the real the path proceeds to that which transcends reality, to faith and to religion. Like every really organic poet, Verhaeren has had to repeat the ascent of universal history in his own evolution.

SYNTHESES

Réunir notre esprit et le monde
Dans les deux mains d'une très simple loi profonde.
É. V., 'L'Attente.'

After the great visions of the cities, after the wonderful interpretations of democracy, there was a moment of appeasement in Verhaeren's work—a lyrical intermezzo of little books: an almanac of the months unfolding in short poems, the cosy happiness of wedded love enshrined in grateful song, the legends of Flanders told in richly coloured pictures, and then, in the great pentalogy *Toute la Flandre*, the cities, coasts, heroes, and great men of his native province compressed in one single picture. But after that Verhaeren takes up once again his old path across the earth; passes again through the roaring cities, the pregnant fields; wanders along the sea-shore; once again through the landscapes of *Les Flamandes* and *Les Moines*, of *Les Villes Tentaculaires* and *Les Campagnes Hallucinées*. It is now the return of the spiral in Goethe's sense of evolution; the return to the same point, but on a higher level, with a loftier outlook, in a narrower circle, and for that reason nearer to the last, the highest point. Once again Ver-

haeren surveys the modern world: now, however, with different eyes, which no longer remain resting on the aspect of the world, but press farther to the cause of all. What he had formerly seen sensuously, the things whose values he had æsthetically estimated and transmuted, he now looks at from the intellectual side, that he may estimate their value morally. He no longer sees each thing separately, no longer adds picture to picture, vision to vision, like a game of coloured cards: he now unites them in one living chain. He no longer searches through individual and detached phenomena; he now sees them together against the background of his lofty intention to weld them into one single picture. Now he composes, not individual poems, but fragments of his world-poem. For, from the time that Verhaeren began to look at things with conscious enthusiasm, they assumed different forms. The straining of his epoch no longer seems to him to be a solitary manifestation of energy, but only a Protean form of the eternal discharge of vigour; the will to life no longer seems to him to be the deed of individual men, but the vitalised primitive will of all humanity. And so, just as of old he attempted in his vision a synthesis of energies, he now sees laws flowing into one supreme and highest thing, into a cosmic law.

Lyric exaltation now arches the dream of its laws over reality. But it is no longer the mere

dream of a youth in expectancy of life—the anæmic, vague, dark, restless dream—but a man's longing to get behind life and follow it to its earthly limit. It is a Utopia enhancing realities beyond themselves; it is the dream of Godhead in things. In the whole world Verhaeren sees a cosmic effort. 'Le monde est trépidant de trains et de navires.' [1] The whole world is excited with human activity and effort; manifestations of the feeling of life flame everywhere; everywhere humanity is fighting for something invisible and perhaps unattainable. But whereas of old the poet estimated the value of every separate energy, now he comprehends all energies as one uniform manifestation, recognises behind the unconscious activity of the individual the sway of something greater—the bourne of all humanity. All who work in the material of the temporal only symbolise eternal forces—intoxication, energy, conquest, joy, error, expectation, Utopia. And it is to these forces, or rather to these forms of the force at the root of all things, that his poems are addressed. In *Les Visages de la Vie* he seeks to describe yearning in all its forms and aims; its distribution in human labour, its restlessness, its vigour, and, above all, its beauty. But not only human manifestations now appear to him in a closer cohesion, the synthesis of realism and metaphysics now makes his relationship to elementary

[1] 'La Conquête' (*La Multiple Splendeur*).

things richer and more heroic. Now, when he treats some motive he had already treated in the first books, and these poems of the first and last periods are compared, it is with astonishment and admiration that you trace the silent growth of these last years. I will mention one example. He had already sung a song to the wind. But the wind at that time was to him the evil storm that tousles cottages, shakes chimneys, forces its way into rooms, rages across country, and brings the winter. It was a senseless power, beautiful in its senselessness, but aimless, an incomprehensible element, a detached phenomenon of Nature. Now, however, the poet in his maturity looks upon it as the wanderer over the undying world, one that has seen all countries, that drives ships over seas, that has sated itself with the perfume of strange flowers and brings it from far away, that penetrates our chest like an aroma and steels and expands it. Now he loves the wind as one of the thousand things of the earth which contribute to the intensification of his vital feeling.

> Si j'aime, admire et chante avec folie,
> Le vent,
> . . . . . .
> C'est qu'il grandit mon être entier et c'est qu'avant
> De s'infiltrer, par mes poumons et par mes pores,
> Jusques au sang dont vit mon corps,
> Avec sa force rude ou sa douceur profonde,
> Immensément, il a étreint le monde.[1]

[1] 'À la Gloire du Vent' (*La Multiple Splendeur*).

So, too, a tree becomes to him the image of the eternal renewal of strength, of resistance to the hardness of winter and of fate, of the will to new beauty in the spring. A mountain no longer appears to him as a chance raising of the landscape, but a great and mighty thing in whose deeps secrets lie, ores, and the source of springs, from whose summit, however, our eyes can sweep the world. The forest interprets itself to him as the labyrinth of a thousand paths, and as the many-voiced anthem of life: everything in Nature becomes a freshening and a vivifying of his vitality. *An absolute transmutation of values has taken place from the time that he has comprehended things as parts of the world's entity, and as themselves an entity.* Travel, formerly a flight from reality, now becomes to him the opening out of new distances, of new possibilities; dream appears to him no longer as an illusion, but as the capacity of intensifying the real from its present to a future state. Europe is no longer to him a group of nations, a geographical idea, but the great symbol of conquest. Money, gold, he no longer regards contemptuously as a materialising of life, but as a new spur for new ambition. And the sea, which in every succeeding work of his sings its unquiet rhythm, is no longer the murderous power that eats into the land, but the holy tide, the symbol of constant strength in eternal unrest; it is to him 'la mer nue et pure, comme une

idée.'[1] Since everything coheres, he feels related to all in a touching brotherhood with things; he no longer feels the presence of things, he loves them like a piece of himself; he feels the sea physically in himself

> Ma peau, mes mains et mes cheveux
> Sentent la mer
> Et sa couleur est dans mes yeux.[2]

And so, just as his vital feeling is renewed every time he comes into contact with the waves, he believes in a physical resurrection of the body out of the sea, believes that his rising from the water is a *nouveau moment de conscience*. Verhaeren has returned to the great cohesion: in Nature and in man there is no longer for him any phenomenon which might not become a symbol for him, a symbol of the great vital instinct, to stimulate and fire his vitality.

And since he now responds to all things with this one feeling, a uniform conception of the world must involuntarily result from this unity of feeling. *To the unity of enthusiasm corresponds the unity of the world, the monistic feeling.* Just as he himself derives nothing but an intensification and exaltation of his feelings from all things, nothing but the very sensation of life, all phenomena and activities must be a synthesis, all forces must flow into one single force as rivers flow into the ocean, all laws must merge in one single law:

[1] 'L'Eau' (*Les Visages de la Vie*). [2] 'Au Bord du Quai' (*Ibid.*).

Toute la vie, avec ses lois, avec ses formes,
—Multiples doigts noueux de quelque main énorme—
S'entr'ouvre et se referme en un poing : l'unité.[1]

And thus, this straining of all humanity, discharged in a thousand forms, must be something in common, a fight against something lying outside of itself, against a resistance which still makes life seem hard, dull, and turbid. This fight of humanity cannot be other than directed against something that impedes the sensation of life. And this, the only thing which struggles against humanity, is in Verhaeren's eyes the supremacy of Nature, the mystery of divine intervention, the subjection of man to fate—in short, all divinity that does not reside in man. As soon as man is dependent on nobody except himself and his own strength, he too will attain the great joyousness of all the things of Nature.

This fight of man to become God, this fight for his independence, his freedom from chance and the supernatural—this is the great metaphysical idea of Verhaeren's work. His last books seek to represent nothing else than this one highest battle of man, this struggle to be free from all that is laid upon him, not by himself, but by Nature, from all that impedes his will to become a thing of Nature, an elementary force, himself. This struggle is the highest and purest effort, for

Rien n'est plus haut, malgré l'angoisse et le tourment,
Que la bataille avec l'énigme et les ténèbres.[2]

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[1] 'La Conquête' (*Les Forces Tumultueuses*). [2] 'Les Cultes' (*Ibid.*).

Man in this battle defends himself against darkness, against what is unknown, against Heaven, against all laws that restrict his expansion; the whole aim of man, the aim he has unconsciously been following for a thousand years, is independence, is to become a law unto himself:

> L'homme dans l'univers n'a qu'un maître, lui-même,
> Et l'univers entier est ce maître, dans lui.[1]

To-day he is still counteracted by chance, or, as many conceive it, by divinity. Wholly to conquer this, to substitute the determination of one's own destiny for chance, will be the great task of the future. Much has been taken from chance already. Lightning, the most dangerous power of heaven, is conquered; distances are bridged over; the forms of Nature are changed; social communities have by common action diverted the iniquity of the weather; diseases are from year to year being fathomed and checked; more and more every incalculable element is being brought within the range of calculation and foresight. But all that is unknown must more and more be the booty of man, whose highest will is 'fouiller l'inconnu.'[2] More and more his eyes penetrate the subterranean and mysterious workings of Nature.

> Or aujourd'hui c'est la réalité
> Secrète encor, mais néanmoins enclose
> Au cours perpétuel et rythmique des choses,

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[1] 'Les Villes' (*Les Forces Tumultueuses*).

[2] 'La Ferveur' (*La Multiple Splendeur*).

Qu'on veut, avec ténacité,
Saisir, pour ordonner la vie et sa beauté
Selon les causes.[1]

For this battle everybody is a soldier in man's war of liberation, all of us stand invisibly ranked together. Everybody who wrests from Nature an increment to knowledge, who does something never done before, everybody who by poetry fires others to action, tears off a piece of the veil. With every step forward that man takes against the dark, with every foot of ground he conquers, divinity loses strength to him; and this will go on until at length nothing remains of the God of old, until the identity of the two ideas humanity and divinity is unconsciously accomplished.

Héros, savant, artiste, apôtre, aventurier,
Chacun troue à son tour le mur noir des mystères
Et, grâce à ces labeurs groupés et solitaires,
L'être nouveau se sent l'univers tout entier.

Seen from this height, professions assume a new poetic value. In the front rank of fighting men Verhaeren sees those the effort of whose life it is to acquire knowledge—the men of science. Verhaeren is perhaps the only one among modern poets who has conceived of science as of perfectly equal value with poetry, *who has discovered new moral and religious values in science, just as he had already discovered new æsthetic values in industri-*

[1] 'Vers le Futur' (*Les Villes Tentaculaires*).

alism and democracy. Most poets had hitherto looked upon science as a hindrance, because they were afraid of clear things as they were afraid of real things. They looked upon science as the destroyer of myths, the negation of every noble superstition which in their eyes was indissolubly connected with the poetical. But just as machinery seemed to them to be ugly, because in the machines they saw beauty had retreated from the outer to the interior form, here too the new ethical value is hidden not in the method but in the aim. Verhaeren esteems science as the great fighter for the new conception of the world: 'Le monde entier est repensé par leurs cervelles.'[1] He knows that the little increments to knowledge which are continually being made in our days in thousands of places, in sanatoria and lecture-rooms, observatories and studies, with microscopes and chemical analyses, weighing and calculation, with measures and numbers, that these little additions to knowledge may, by comparison and reproduction, grow into great creative discoveries which will immensely enrich our vital feeling. And this hymn to science is at the same time a hymn to our epoch; for no epoch before ours has so consciously fought for the advancement of knowledge, none has been so replete with the longing for new knowledge and the transmutation of values:

[1] 'La Conquête' (*Les Forces Tumultueuses*).

L'acharnement à tout peser, à tout savoir
Fouille la forêt drue et mouvante des êtres.[1]

In inspired words Verhaeren celebrates science as the highest effort of our age as of the past; for he knows that what to us to-day is presupposed and self-evident was a thousand years ago the goal of the most ardent effort, that the road we pace indolently to-day is soaked with the blood of martyrs.

Dites ! quels temps versés au gouffre des années,
Et quelle angoisse ou quel espoir des destinées,
Et quels cerveaux chargés de noble lassitude
A-t-il fallu pour faire un peu de certitude ?
. . . . . .
Dites ! les feux et les bûchers ; dites ! les claies ;
Les regards fous, en des visages d'effroi blanc ;
Dites ! les corps martyrisés, dites ! les plaies
Criant la vérité, avec leur bouche en sang.[2]

But he knows equally well that the acquisitions of to-day are again only hypotheses for the new truths of to-morrow. Error is inevitable, but even error opens out new ways. In the beautiful idea of Březina, the Czech poet, all ideal aims are floating islands that recede as we approach them. The highest aim is in effort itself, in the life which effort intensifies. Verhaeren's optimism here guards his marches against banality, for he is sufficient of a mystic to know that it is the unknowable and the inaccessible that lend all things their impenetrable beauty. But the knowledge of this must not scare enthusiasm away :

[1] 'Vers le Futur' (*Les Villes Tentaculaires*).
[2] 'La Recherche' (*Ibid.*).

Partons quand même, avec notre âme inassouvie,
Puisque la force et que la vie
Sont au delà des vérités et des erreurs.[1]

What if a few last things remain eternally inscrutable : ' plutôt que d'en peupler les coins par des chimères, nous préférons ne point savoir.' [2] Rather a world without gods than one with false gods, rather incomplete knowledge than false knowledge.

Here, where the heroes of science reach the limits of what is possible to them, a new group must stand by their side and help them in their work. These are the poets, who preach faith where knowledge ends. They must find the synthesis between science and religion, between the earthly and the divine, the new synthesis—*religious confidence in science.* Their optimism must force their fellow-men to have faith in science, as in earlier days they had faith in gods : though proofs fail them, they must demand from this new religion what the early fathers demanded for the old religion. And he himself, Verhaeren, he who once—here again a bitter ' no ' is turned into an exulting ' yes '—said in his beginnings

Toute science enferme au fond d'elle le doute,
Comme une mère enceinte étreint un enfant mort,[3]

he himself is to-day the first of confident enthusiasts. Where individual minds are still at war—

[1] ' L'Erreur ' (*Les Forces Tumultueuses*).
[2] ' La Ferveur ' (*La Multiple Splendeur*).
[3] ' Méditation ' (*Les Moines*).

'Oh! ces luttes là-haut entre ces dieux humains![1]—

where their knowledge has not yet found a bridge, poets must with enthusiasm and confidence surmise a path. They must link law with perception; and in the same measure as the scientists have by knowledge fed their enthusiasm, they in their turn must feed knowledge by their confidence. If they have no proofs of actualities, their faith dowers them with the confidence to say, 'nous croyons déjà ce que les autres sauront.'[2] They scent and surmise new things before they are born; they trust hypotheses before they are proved. Already,

> Pendant que disputent et s'embrouillent encor,
> À coups de textes morts
> Et de dogmes, les sages,[3]

they hear the hovering wings of the new truth. They already believe in what later generations will know; they derive vital joy from what their descendants will be the first to possess. They doubt in nothing; not that man will conquer the air, quell disease, make life cheerful and easier; they do not despair in progress, and in their ecstasy they leap over all obstacles. 'Le cri de Faust n'est plus le nôtre';[4] the question as to 'yes' and 'no' has long since been joyfully answered in the affirmative, exults the poet; we

[1] 'Les Penseurs' (*La Multiple Splendeur*).
[2] 'La Science' (*Les Forces Tumultueuses*).
[3] 'L'Action' (*Les Visages de la Vie*).
[4] 'La Science' (*Les Forces Tumultueuses*).

no longer hesitate between the possibility and the impossibility of knowledge, we believe in it, and faith and confidence is already the highest knowledge of life. In this optimism of poets other discoverers of knowledge must now fulfil their growth, from these dreams they must derive strength for their activity; all men must in this way complete one another, that it may be possible for them to beleaguer darkness, perfect the conquest of God, and

> Emprisonner quand même, un jour, l'éternité,
> Dans le gel blanc d'une immobile vérité.[1]

For this new truth, the Man-God whom they are to discover, poets and scholars are the new saints; and his servants are all those whose brows are fiery with the fever of work, whose hands are scorched with experiments, whose nerves are strained by constant effort, whose eyes are fatigued by books. To all of these Verhaeren's hymn is addressed:

> Qu'ils soient sacrés par les foules, ces hommes
> Qui scrutèrent les faits pour en tirer les lois.[2]

But still farther reaches Verhaeren's enthusiasm for those who help in the new work, for the 'saccageurs d'infini.'[3] Not only the thinker and the poet extend the horizon of life, but each one also who creates and is in any way at work. Only the man who creates is really alive and really

[1] 'Les Penseurs' (*La Multiple Splendeur*).
[2] 'La Science' (*Les Forces Tumultueuses*).
[3] 'Les Penseurs' (*La Multiple Splendeur*).

a man—'seul existe qui crée.'[1] And so his hymn is likewise addressed to those who toil with their hands, to those who, without knowing the aim, toil stolidly day by day in mines and fields; for they too build the face of the earth, create mountains where there were none, rear lights by the sea's marge, construct machines and the huge telescopes that pry on the heavens: all of them forge the tools of knowledge and prepare the new era. Merchants who send across the ocean ships that spin threads from farthest shore to shore, they too weave the net of the great unity; traders who spread gold, who quicken the circulation of the world's blood, they too co-operate in the battle waged with the dark. It is their league and union which, first of all, gives humanity its great strength; they all prepare the hour, the moment, which must inevitably come.

Il viendra l'instant, où tant d'efforts savants et ingénus,
Tant de génie et de cerveaux tendus vers l'inconnu,
Quand même, auront bâti sur des bases profondes
Et jaillissant au ciel, la synthèse du monde ![2]

Here in fiery dawns glimmer the days of the future. Tens of thousands will struggle, will prepare, until at last the one man comes who shall lay the last stone of the edifice, 'le tranquille rebelle,'[3] the Christ of this new religion.

[1] 'La Mort' (*La Multiple Splendeur*).
[2] 'La Recherche' (*Les Villes Tentaculaires*).
[3] 'L'Attente' (*Les Visages de la Vie*).

C'est que celui qu'on attendait n'est point venu,
Celui que la nature entière
Suscitera un jour, âme et rose trémière,
Sous les soleils puissants non encore connus ;
C'est que la race ardente et fine,
Dont il sera la fleur,
N'a point multiplié ses milliers de racines
Jusqu'au tréfonds des profondeurs.[1]

For here in Verhaeren's work this vision arises fervent and glowing. Incessantly man proceeds on the path of his destiny. Once his whole world was replete with divinity, 'jadis tout l'inconnu était peuplé de dieux'; [2] then one single God took right and might into His hand; but now, by means of his strength and passion, man has wrested, year by year, one secret after the other from this Unknown Power. More and more he has conquered chance by laws, faith by knowledge, fear by safety; more and more the power of the gods glides insensibly into his hands, more and more he determines his own life; and the process will continue till he is in every respect the captain of his fate; he is less and less subject to laws he has not himself established; more and more Nature's slave becomes her lord.

Races, régnez : puisque par vous la volonté du sort
Devient de plus en plus la volonté humaine.[3]

Gods will become men; exterior fate will return into their bosom; the saints will hence-

[1] 'L'Attente' (*Les Visages de la Vie*).
[2] 'La Folie' (*Les Forces Tumultueuses*).
[3] (*La Multiple Splendeur*).

forth be only their brothers; and Paradise will be the earth itself. Most beautifully Verhaeren has expressed this idea in one of his latest books,[1] in the symbol of Adam and Eve. Eve, expelled from the Garden of Eden, one day finds its doors open again. But she does not re-enter it, for her highest joy, her Paradise, is now in activity and the pleasure of the earth. Zest in existence, in life, joy of the earth, has never been more strongly and burningly exalted than in this symbol; never has the hymn of humanity been sung with greater fervour than by this poet—perhaps because he had denied life more wildly and more obstinately than any other. Here all contrasts sing together in a harmony without a flaw; the last enmity between man and Nature here becomes the ecstatic feeling of man's godhead.

And strange to say, here the circle of life returns to itself. The books of the poet's old age return to the days of his youth, to the school benches in Ghent where Maeterlinck also sat, the other great Fleming. Both, who lost themselves there, have found themselves again on the heights of life in their conception of the world, for Maeterlinck's highest teaching also (in his book *Wisdom and Destiny*) is, that all fate is locked up in man himself, that it is man's highest evolution, his highest duty, to conquer fate, all that lies outside him, God. This profound thought, which has thus twice in our days blossomed forth

[1] *Les Rythmes Souverains.*

from Flemish soil, has been achieved on different paths. Maeterlinck has found it by listening to the mysticism of silence, Verhaeren by listening to the noise of life. He has found his new God not in the darkness of dreams but in the light of streets, in all places where men bestir themselves, and where from heavy hours the trembling flower of joy is born.

THE ETHICS OF FERVOUR

La vie est à monter et non pas à descendre.
É. V., 'Les Rêves.'

Il faut admirer tout pour s'exalter soi-même
Et se dresser plus haut que ceux qui ont vécu.
É. V., 'La Vie.'

THE metaphysical ideal crystallised by Verhaeren from his contemplation of life, which was at first wildly passionate, but then more and more synoptical and logical, has been called unity. He has himself recently, in answer to a question submitted to various men of letters, confirmed this conception as part of his programme. 'It seems to me,' he says, 'that poetry is bound ere long to be merged in a very clear Pantheism. More and more the unity of the world is admitted by upright and healthy minds. That old dualism between the soul and the body, between God and the universe, is becoming effaced. Man is a fragment of the architecture of the world. He understands and is conscious of the entity of which he is a part. . . . He feels that he is encompassed and dominated, while at the same time he himself encompasses and dominates. By reason of his own miracles he is becoming, in some sort, that personal God that his ancestors believed in. Now I ask, is it possible that lyric

exaltation should long remain indifferent to such an unchaining of human power, should hesitate to celebrate such a vast spectacle of grandeur? The poet of to-day has only to surrender himself to what he sees, hears, imagines, conjectures, for works to be born of his heart and brain that are young, vibrating, and new.' [1] But he who would build up the whole image must not make a halt at this stage of knowledge: over against the logical ordering of external things he must set another of inward things; against the knowledge of life he must set the feeling of life. He must set up an ethical ideal as well as a metaphysical ideal, a commandment of life corresponding to his law of life.

But great poets never discover a standard of life, a moral precept, which is not a reflex of the law of their own inner nature. Many possibilities of contemplation are open to the thinker, to the quiet observer; to the poet however, to the lyrist, only a poetic philosophy of life is possible, a contemplation lyrically exalted. Whereas the philosopher can attain the knowledge of unity by measurement and calculation, by a perception and calm computation of forces, a poet can discover the evolution of things in the direction of harmony and unity only in his ecstasy, only in an exalted state of enthusiasm. He will perforce recognise a commandment for the whole world in his own enthusiasm, and in his lyric ecstasy a

[1] G. Le Cardonnel et Ch. Vellay, *La Littérature Contemporaine.*

moral demand of life. 'Toute la vie est dans l'essor,' for the poet all life is in ecstasy. And just as Verhaeren never described things in a state of rest, so too his comprehension of the universe is never conceivable except in the permanently exalted state of the unrest of joy and motion.

Verhaeren's relationship to the world around him was ever passionate. He has always approached things feverishly, as a lover approaches the woman he desires. Only what he has won by fighting has the value to him of a possession. Things do not belong to us as long as we pass them by, as long as we only look at them with unfeeling and cold eyes as though they were a scene in a play, a walking picture. To feel the connection between them and us, between the world and the poet, between man and man, to pass over from the purely contemplative state to the assessment of values, we must enter into some personal relationship of sympathy or antipathy. Verhaeren's first crisis had taught him that negation is sterile, and his recovery had then shown him that only assent, acceptance, affection, and enthusiasm can place us in a real relationship with things.

> Pour vivre clair, ferme et juste,
> Avec mon cœur, j'admire tout
> Ce qui vibre, travaille et bout
> Dans la tendresse humaine et sur la terre auguste.[1]

[1] 'Autour de ma Maison' (*La Multiple Splendeur*).

A thing only belongs to us when it is felt—not so much for us personally—as beautiful, necessary, and vivid: only when we have said 'yes' to it. *And therefore our whole evolution can only be to admire as much as possible, to understand as much as possible, to let our feeling have intercourse with as many things as possible.* To contemplate is too little; to understand is too little. Only when we have confirmed a thing from its very roots, confirmed it as necessary, does it really belong to us. 'Il faut aimer pour découvrir avec génie.' And so our whole effort must be to overcome what is negative in ourselves, to reject nothing, to kill the critical spirit in ourselves, to strengthen what is positive in us, to assent as much as possible. Here again Verhaeren is in agreement with Nietzsche's last ideals: 'Warding things off, keeping things down, is a waste of energy, a squandering of strength on negative purposes.'[1] Criticism is sterile. Verhaeren is here as ever a relativist of values, for he knows that they are incessantly occupied in a process of transformation in favour of their highest value, and therefore he holds enthusiasm (the symbol of over-estimation) to be more important, in the sense of a higher justice, than what is apparently absolute justice itself.

For this is the essential: if in our estimation we often over-estimate things which in any case would preserve their inner value independently

[1] *Ecce Homo!*

of our 'yes' or 'no,' that is not so great a danger as it is a profit that our own souls should grow by means of our admiration. 'Admirer, c'est se grandir.'[1] For if we admire more, and more intensively, than others, we shall ourselves grow richer than those timid ones who content themselves with choice morsels of life instead of grasping life in its entirety, who restrict themselves because they only place themselves in relationship with a part of the world and not with the whole cosmos. The more a man admires, the more he possesses :

> Il faut admirer tout pour s'exalter soi-même
> Et se dresser plus haut que ceux qui ont vécu
> De coupables souffrances et de désirs vaincus.[2]

For admiration means, in the highest sense, subordinating oneself to other things. *The more a man suppresses his own personal pride, the higher he stands in the moral sense.* For to accentuate oneself and to deny what is not oneself needs less strength than to suppress oneself and to surrender oneself in admiration to all else. Here Verhaeren sees the rise of a new ethical problem. A whole ladder of values is revealed to him in the moral standard of freedom and frankness with which a man can meet his fellows in his admiration; a ladder on whose topmost rung the man stands who rejects nothing whatever, who meets every manifestation of life with

[1] 'La Ferveur' (*La Multiple Splendeur*). [2] 'La Vie' (*Ibid.*).

ecstasy. To be able to admire more means to grow more oneself :

> Oh ! vivre et vivre et se sentir meilleur
> À mesure que bout plus fervemment le cœur ;
> Vivre plus clair, dès qu'on marche en conquête ;
> Vivre plus haut encor, dès que le sort s'entête
> À dessécher la force et l'audace des bras.[1]

And so strong must this restless enthusiasm grow, this incessant enthusiasm for things, that the height of the ascent suddenly surprises one with a rapt feeling of dizziness. The lyrical commandment of the highest ecstasy is here an ethical standard :

> Il faut en tes élans te dépasser sans cesse,
> Être ton propre étonnement.[2]

In this idea of restless enthusiasm, the principles of which have also been expounded by Verhaeren in his essay *Cosmic Enthusiasm* (*Insel-Almanach*, 1913), he has established a poetic equivalent to his other great impulse of humanity, set an ethical ideal by the side of the metaphysical ideal. For if of old the yearning for knowledge, that superb struggle for the conquest of the unknown, was the only thing that placed man in an eternally living relationship to the new things, what is possibly a still more valuable instinct is discovered in this incessantly intensified ecstatic admiration. Admiring is more than

[1] 'L'Action' (*Les Visages de la Vie*).
[2] 'L'Impossible' (*Les Forces Tumultueuses*).

estimating and knowing. To surrender oneself in love to all things is higher than the curiosity to know everything. 'Tout affronter vaut mieux que tout comprendre.'[1] For in all knowledge there is still a residue of selfishness, of the pride of personal acquisition, while admiration of things contains nothing but humility—that great humility, however, which is an infinite enrichment of life, because it signifies a dissolution in the all. Whereas knowledge is brought to a sudden standstill before many things and finds the road blocked with darkness, in admiration, in ecstasy, there is no limit set to the ego. *Though many values lock themselves up from knowledge, none denies itself wholly to admiration.* Even the smallest thing becomes great when it is penetrated with love, and the greater we let things grow—the more we enrich the substance of our own life—the more infinite we make our ego. It is the highest ethical task of a great man to find the highest value in every phenomenon, and to free this value from the thick and often stifling rind of antipathy and strangeness. Not to let oneself be repelled by resistance is the perfection of a noble enthusiasm. If anything whatsoever is void of beauty, it will have a power which by its energy expresses beauty. If anything seems strange and ugly in the traditional sense, it will set the wonderful task of finding out the new sense in which it is beautiful. *And to have found*

[1] 'Les Rêves' (*La Multiple Splendeur*).

this new beauty in the new things was the active greatness of the poetic work, the greatness which was unconscious and now becomes conscious, which was knowledge and now becomes law. While all others considered our great cities frightful and ugly, Verhaeren praised their magnificence; while all others abhorred science as an obstacle to poetry, Verhaeren celebrated it as the purest form of life. For he knows that everything changes, that 'ce qui fut hier le but est l'obstacle demain,'[1] and *vice versa* that the obstacle of to-day may perhaps be the goal of the next generation. He had already recognised in his poetry what the architectural movement in the great cities in the last few years has realised, that huge shops, as emporia of intellectual life, as new centres of force, provide tasks for art as stupendous as the cathedrals of old; that in the reek and smoke of teeming cities new tones of colour were waiting for painters, new problems for philosophers; that all that in our own time looms bulky and unseemly will to the next generation be well-proportioned and have to be called beautiful. Verhaeren's enthusiasm for what is new overcomes the resistance of reverence for tradition. Verhaeren has rendered signal service to our time by being the first to recognise and proclaim the great impressionists and all innovators in art and poetry. For to reject nothing new, to be hostile to nothing the world can offer, this only

[1] 'L'Impossible' (*Les Forces Tumultueuses*).

is what he understands by knowing the world as it is and truly loving it. His ladder of values ends on high in this absolute ideal of admiration of the whole world, not only of that which is but of that which shall be, of the identity of every ego with the time and its forms :

> L'homme n'est suprême et clair que si sa volonté
> Est d'être lui en même temps qu'il est monde.

And since this boundless admiration turns selfishness to dust—selfishness, the eternal obstacle to all purely human relations—since, in a word, it produces a kind of brotherly relationship to all things, it also opens out the possibility of levelling the relationship between man and man. The book *La Multiple Splendeur*, which has given definite expression to these ethical ideas, was originally intended to be called *Admirez-vous les Uns les Autres*. In this book self-surrender is considered as the highest ideal, the gift of oneself to the whole world, the distribution of oneself among all people. No longer, as in the earlier books, are energy, strength, and conquest by strength, the quelling of resistance, the ultimate sense of life, but goodness, scattering oneself broadcast, becoming the all by surrender to the all. Greatness in this new sense can only arise by ecstatic admiration. 'Il faut aimer pour découvrir avec génie.' Admiration and love are the strongest forces of the world. Love will be the highest form of the new relations—it will

regulate all earthly relationships; love shall be the social levelling.

L'amour dont la puissance encore est inconnue,
Dans sa profondeur douce et sa charité nue,
Ira porter la joie égale aux résignés;
Les sacs ventrus de l'or seront saignés
Un soir d'ardente et large équité rouge;
Disparaîtront palais, banques, comptoirs et bouges;
Tout sera simple et clair, quand l'orgueil sera mort,
Quand l'homme, au lieu de croire à l'égoïste effort,
Qui s'éterniserait, en une âme immortelle,
Dispensera vers tous sa vie accidentelle;
Des paroles, qu'aucun livre ne fait prévoir,
Débrouilleront ce qui paraît complexe et noir;
Le faible aura sa part dans l'existence entière,
Il aimera son sort—et la matière
Confessera peut-être, alors, ce qui fut Dieu.[1]

And in still greater, still more monumental expression, in stone tables of the law as it were, Verhaeren has compressed his new moral idea in a single poem:

Si nous nous admirons vraiment les uns les autres,
Du fond même de notre ardeur et notre foi,
Vous les penseurs, vous les savants, vous les apôtres,
Pour les temps qui viendront vous extrairez la loi.

Nous apportons, ivres du monde et de nous-mêmes,
Des cœurs d'hommes nouveaux dans le vieil univers.
Les Dieux sont loin et leur louange et leur blasphème;
Notre force est en nous et nous avons souffert.

Nous admirons nos mains, nos yeux et nos pensées,
Même notre douleur qui devient notre orgueil;
Toute recherche est fermement organisée
Pour fouiller l'inconnu dont nous cassons le seuil.

[1] 'Un Soir' (*Les Forces Tumultueuses*).

S'il est encor là-bas des caves de mystère
Où tout flambeau s'éteint ou recule effaré,
Plutôt que d'en peupler les coins par des chimères
Nous préférons ne point savoir que nous leurrer.

Un infini plus sain nous cerne et nous pénètre ;
Notre raison monte plus haut ; notre cœur bout ;
Et nous nous exaltons si bellement des êtres
Que nous changeons le sens que nous avons de tout.

Cerveau, tu règnes seul sur nos actes lucides ;
Aimer, c'est asservir ; admirer, se grandir ;
O tel profond vitrail, dans l'ombre des absides,
Qui reflète la vie et la fait resplendir !

Aubes, matins, midis et soirs, toute lumière
Est aussitôt muée en or et en beauté,
Il exalte l'espace et le ciel et la terre
Et transforme le monde à travers sa clarté. [1]

This sensation of recognising oneself in all things by enthusiasm, of living with everything that has existence and a visible form, is pantheism, is a Teutonic conception of the universe. But in Verhaeren pantheism finds its very last intensification. Identity is to him not only cerebral knowledge, but experience ; identity is not the sensation of being similar to things in body and soul, but an indissoluble unity. Whosoever admires a thing so wholly that he goes down to the roots of his feeling, that he dissolves and denies himself in order to be wholly this other thing, is at this moment of ecstasy identical with it. Ecstasy is no longer what it means in the Greek derivation, the fact of stepping out of one-

[1] 'La Ferveur' (*La Multiple Splendeur*).

self, of losing oneself; it signifies, in addition to that, the finding of oneself in the other thing. And with this Verhaeren's cosmic conception goes beyond pantheism. He not only senses things as though he were their brother; not only does he sense himself in them, he himself lives them. Not only does he feel his blood pouring into other beings, he no longer feels any blood of his own at all; he only feels this strange, glowing sap of the world in his veins. I know of no more fiery eruption than those moments of Verhaeren when he is no longer able to distinguish the world from his ego, this unique cosmic intoxication:

> Je ne distingue plus le monde de moi-même,
> Je suis l'ample feuillage et les rameaux flottants,
> Je suis le sol dont je foule les cailloux pâles
> Et l'herbe des fossés où soudain je m'affale
> Ivre et fervent, hagard, heureux et sanglotant.[1]

All the forms of the elements are a personal experience to him: 'J'existe en tout ce qui m'entoure et me pénètre.'[2] All that has happened becomes to him a manifestation of his own body; he feels all cosmic happenings as personal experiences:

> Oh! les rythmes fougueux de la nature entière
> Et les sentir et les darder à travers soi!
> Vivre les mouvements répandus dans les bois,
> Le sol, les vents, la mer et les tonnerres;
> Vouloir qu'en son cerveau tressaille l'univers.[3]

Here the billows of enthusiasm dash higher and

[1] 'Autour de ma Maison' (*La Multiple Splendeur*).
[2] 'La Joie' (*Ibid.*). [3] 'L'En-avant' (*Les Forces Tumultueuses*).

higher, this call to union by enthusiasm grows to an ever more passionate command :

> Exaltez-vous encore et comprenez-vous mieux,
> Reconnaissez-vous donc et magnifiez-vous
> Dans l'ample et myriadaire splendeur des choses ! [1]

For if men hitherto have arrived at no clear and harmonious relationship with one another, that was because, so Verhaeren thinks, they had not admiration sufficient, because they were too suspicious of one another, because they had too little faith. 'Magnifiez-vous donc et comprenez-vous mieux ! ' [2] he calls out to them, 'admirez-vous les uns les autres ! ' and here, in the last phase of his knowledge, he is again in agreement with the great American, who, in his poem *Starting from Paumanok*, preaches :

> I say no man has ever yet been half devout enough,
> None has ever yet adored or worshipped half enough,
> None has begun to think how divine he himself is, and how certain the future is.

For the highest pleasure is only in this highest ecstasy. And therefore these ideals of Verhaeren are not cold, sober commandments, but a passionate hymn.

> Aimer avec ferveur soi-même en tous les autres
> Qui s'exaltent de même en de mêmes combats
> Vers le même avenir dont on entend le pas ;
> Aimer leur cœur et leur cerveau pareils aux vôtres
> Parce qu'ils ont souffert, en des jours noirs et fous,
> Même angoisse, même affre et même deuil que vous.

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[1] 'La Louange du Corps humain' (*La Multiple Splendeur*).

[2] *Ibid.* (*Ibid.*).

Et s'enivrer si fort de l'humaine bataille
—Pâle et flottant reflet des monstrueux assauts
Ou des groupements d'or des étoiles, là-haut—
Qu'on vit en tout ce qui agit, lutte ou tressaille
Et qu'on accepte avidement, le cœur ouvert,
L'âpre et terrible loi qui régit l'univers.[1]

To raise these mystic moments of ecstasy, these seconds of identity, which every one in his life experiences in quite rare and strange moments, to permanency, to a constant, unconquerable feeling of life—this is Verhaeren's highest aim. His cosmic conception is concentrated in this supreme ideal of an incessantly felt identity of the ego with its environment, of an identity ever fired anew by passion.

For not till nothing more is contemplation and everything is experience, not till this vast enrichment is accomplished, does life cease to be vegetative, indifferent, and somnolent, not till then does it turn to pure delight. Not to feel individual feelings of pleasure, but to feel life itself in all its forms as supreme pleasure, is the last goal of Verhaeren's art. What he says of Juliers, the hero of Flanders, 'son existence était sa volupté,'[2] *the fact of life itself was his pleasure,* is also his own highest longing. He does not want life that he may fill out the span that is allotted to every mortal, but that he may consciously enjoy, and to the full, every minute of life as a delight and as

[1] 'La Vie' (*La Multiple Splendeur*).
[2] 'Guillaume de Juliers' (*Les Héros*).

happiness. And in such a moment of ecstasy he says,

> Il me semble jusqu'à ce jour n'avoir vécu
> Que pour mourir et non pour vivre,[1]

lines that seem to me unforgettable, as the highest ecstasy of vitality.

And, wonderful to say, here too the circle is closed, here too the end of Verhaeren's knowledge—as we have seen in so many things with him—is a return to the beginning. Here too there is nothing save an inherited instinct which has become a rapt consciousness. His first book and his last ones, *Les Flamandes*, as well as *Les Rythmes Souverains* and *Les Blés Mouvants*, celebrate life—the first, it is true, only life's outer form, the dull enjoyment of the senses: the last books, however, celebrate the conscious, intensified, sublimated feeling of life. Verhaeren's whole evolution—here again in harmony with the great poets of our nation, with Nietzsche and Dehmel—is not suppression, but a conscious intensification of original instincts. Just as in his first books he described his native province, and again in his last, save that now the land is bounded by the horizons of the whole world, here again the feeling of life returns as the sense of life, but it is now enriched with all the knowledge he has acquired, with all the victories he has won. Passion, which was in his first book a chaotic revolt, has here become a law; the instinctive

[1] 'Un Matin' (*Les Forces Tumultueuses*).

sensation of pleasure in health has been transformed into a deliberate and conscious pleasure in life and in all its forms. Now again Verhaeren feels the great pride of a strong man :

> Je marche avec l'orgueil d'aimer l'air et la terre,
> D'être immense et d'être fou
> Et de mêler le monde et tout
> À cet enivrement de vie élémentaire.[1]

The health of the strong race he once celebrated in the lads and lasses of his native province, he now sings in himself. And so strong is the identity between his ego and the world that he, desiring to sing the beauty of the whole world, is now compelled to include himself and to celebrate his own body. He who of old hated his body as a prison out of which he could not escape to flee from himself, he who wished to ' spit himself out,' now fits into the hymn of the world a stanza in celebration of his own ego :

> J'aime mes yeux, mes bras, mes mains, ma chair,
> mon torse
> Et mes cheveux amples et blonds,
> Et je voudrais, par mes poumons,
> Boire l'espace entier pour en gonfler ma force.[2]

The feeling of identity has given him absolute identity in regard to himself.

It is not in vanity that he celebrates himself, but in gratitude. For the body is to him only a means of sensing the beauty, power, and beneficence of the world, is to him a wonderful possi-

[1] ' Un Matin ' (*Les Forces Tumultueuses*). [2] *Ibid.* (*Ibid.*).

bility of enjoying things by strength in strong passion. And wonderful are these thanks of an ageing man to his eyes and ears and chest for still permitting him to feel earth's beauty with all the fervour of old :

Soyez remerciés, mes yeux,
D'être restés si clairs, sous mon front déjà vieux,
Pour voir au loin bouger et vibrer la lumière ;
Et vous, mes mains, de tressaillir dans le soleil ;
Et vous, mes doigts, de vous dorer aux fruits vermeils
Pendus au long du mur, près des roses trémières.

Soyez remercié, mon corps,
D'être ferme, rapide, et frémissant encor
Au toucher des vents prompts ou des brises profondes ;
Et vous, mon torse clair et mes larges poumons,
De respirer au long des mers ou sur les monts,
L'air radieux et vif qui baigne et mord les mondes.[1]

Thus, too, he now celebrates all things to which he is related—his body ; the race and the ancestors to whom he owes his being ; the country fields that have given him youth ; the cities that have given him his vast outlook : he celebrates Europe and America, the past and the future. *And just as he feels himself to be strong and healthy, so too his feeling conceives of the whole world as healthy and great.* That is the incomparable and, probably, the unparalleled thing in Verhaeren's verses, what makes him so exceedingly dear to many as to me, that here cheerfulness, worldly pleasure, joy, and ecstasy are sensed not only intellectually as pride, but that this pleasure is

[1] 'La Joie' (*La Multiple Splendeur*).

felt positively *in the body*, with all the fibres of the blood, with all the muscles and nerves of the man. His stanzas are really, as Bazalgette so beautifully says, 'une décharge d'électricité humaine,'[1] a discharge of human, of physical electricity. Joy here becomes a physical excess, an intoxication, a superabundance without parallel :

> Nous apportons, ivres du monde et de nous-mêmes,
> Des cœurs d'hommes nouveaux dans le vieil univers.[2]

There is now no disharmony between the individual poems; they are one single bubbling up of enthusiasm, 'un enivrement de soi-même'; over the many convulsive, quivering, irregular ecstasies of old now flames the ecstasy of the whole feeling of life. This ecstasy stands in our days like a figure proud, strong, and erect, exultingly flourishing the torch of passion aloft to greet the future, 'vers la joie'!

Here ends Verhaeren's ethic work. And I believe that no exaltation, no knowledge can again change this last pure form, or make it still more beautiful. A vast expenditure of force, the effort of one of our strongest and most incomparable men, has here reached its goal. Once force seemed to him to be the strength of the world; now, however, in his purer knowledge, he sees it in goodness, in admiration, in that force which, with the same intensity as turned it out-

[1] 'Léon Bazalgette, *Émile Verhaeren.*

[2] 'La Ferveur' (*La Multiple Splendeur*).

wards of old, is now directed inwards; which no longer constrains to conquest, but to self-surrender, to a boundless humility. Over the immense savagery and apparent chaos of the first works this knowledge now arches this rainbow of reconciliation, over *Les Forces Tumultueuses* shines *La Multiple Splendeur*. And to himself may be applied the words he dedicated to his hymn of all humanity—'La joie et la bonté sont les fleurs de sa force.' [1]

[1] 'Les Mages' (*La Multiple Splendeur*).

LOVE

Ceux qui vivent d'amour vivent d'éternité.
É. V., *Les Heures d'après-midi.*

FILLED with contemporary spirit as Verhaeren's work is, there is one point in which it appears to stray from our epoch, to be remote from the artistic preoccupations of other poets. Verhaeren's poetry is almost entirely free from eroticism. The problem of love is with him far from being, as it is with most poets, the feeling at the root of all feelings; it is hardly ever a motive force in his work; it remains a little arabesque delicately curved above his massive architecture. Verhaeren's enthusiasms spring from other sources. Love is for him almost without a sexual shade of meaning, perfectly identical with enthusiasm, self-surrender, ecstasy; and the difference between the sexes does not seem to be an essential, but only an incidental form among the thousandfold militant forms of life. The love of woman, sexual necessity, is scarcely a force greater than any other in the circle of forces, never the most important or actually the root-force, as it is (for instance) to Dehmel, who derives the consciousness of all great cosmic phases of knowledge from the experience of love.

Verhaeren's horizons are illuminated, not by the flame of the erotic, but by the passionate fire of purely intellectual impulses. His first books, those lyric volumes which are nearly always a poet's confessions of love, were devoted to landscapes and then to social phenomena, to monks, and to men who toil with their hands. The strength of his drama pulses in conflicts exclusively masculine. Thus his work, already vastly removed from that of the other lyrists of our time, is seen to be still more isolated. To Verhaeren love is only a single page, not the first and not the last, in the book of the world: this poet has lavished too much glowing passion and ecstatic feeling on all individual things and the universe for the cry of the desire of woman to ring higher than all other voices.

This lack of accentuation of eroticism in Verhaeren's work does not by any means strike me as a weakness, a missing nerve in his artistic organism. It may read like a paradox, but it must be said: just this apparent artistic deficiency indicates personal strength. Verhaeren's masculinity is so pronounced and strong that woman could never become the root-problem of his passion, or shake him in the foundations of his fate. To a really strong man, love, sexual love, is a matter of course; a sterling man does not feel it as an obstacle and not as a vital conflict, but as a necessity, like nourishment, air, and liberty. But a thing that is a matter of course is never conceived by an artist as a problem. In

his youth Verhaeren was never perplexed by love, for the simple reason that he did not attach sufficient importance to it, because his poetic interests were in the first place directed to a mightier possession, a philosophy of life. A sterling man, as Verhaeren conceives him, does not spend his strength in sexual love. For such a man the metaphysical instinct, the longing for knowledge, the need of finding his inner statics in the cosmos, goes before love. 'Ève voulait aimer, Adam voulait connaître.'[1] Only to woman is love the sense of life; to man, in Verhaeren's idea, the sense of life is knowledge. He expressed this sound idea still more clearly in an early poem:

> Les forts montent la vie ainsi qu'un escalier,
> Sans voir d'abord que les femmes sur leurs passages
> Tendent vers eux leurs seins, leurs fronts et leur visages.[2]

Paying no heed to the seductions of love, the strong men, the really great, ascend to the skies, to spiritual knowledge; they gather the fruits of stars and comets; and then, only then, when they are returning, tired by their lonely wandering, do they observe women, and lay down in their hands the knowledge of the great worlds. *Not in the beginning, in the vehement days of youth, but only when manhood is established, only in the time of inner maturity, can woman become a great experience for Verhaeren.* He must

[1] 'Le Paradis' (*Les Rythmes Souverains*).
[2] 'Hommage' (*Au Bord de la Route*).

first of all have acquired a firm footing, must know his place in the world, before he can yield himself up to love. It is strange that the sonnet I have quoted should have been written in youth, because, like a presentiment, it relates the fate of his own life in advance. For the images of women never stopped his path nor turned him aside from it; love, if I may say so, only occupied his senses and never absorbed his soul. Not till later, till the years when the crisis was undermining his body, when his nerves were giving way under the terrible strain, when solitude reared itself before his face like an inseparable foe, did a woman enter his life. Then, and not till then, did love and marriage—the personal symbol of eternal, exterior order—give him inward rest. And to this woman the only love-poems he ever wrote are addressed. In Verhaeren's work, which is graded like a trilogy—in this symphony that is often brutal—there is a quiet, soft andante, a trilogy in the trilogy, one of love. From the point of view of art, these three books, *Les Heures Claires*, *Les Heures d'Après-midi*, and *Les Heures du Soir*, are not less in value than his great works, but they are more gentle. From this savage and passionate man one might have expected visionary, seething ecstasies, a tempestuous discharge of erotic feeling; but these books are a wonderful disappointment. They are not spoken to the crowd, but to one woman only, and for that reason they are not

spoken loudly, but with a voice subdued. Religious consciousness—for with Verhaeren all that is poetic is religious in a new sense—finds a new form here. *Here Verhaeren does not preach, he prays.* These little pages are the privacy of his personal life, the confession of a passion which is great indeed, but veiled as it were with a delicate shame. 'Oh! la tendresse des forts!' is Bazalgette's inspired comment. And in truth, it is impossible to imagine anything more touching than the sight of this mighty fighter here lowering his resonant voice to the soft breathings of devotion. These verses are quite simple, spoken low, as though wild and too passionate words might imperil so noble a feeling, as though a strong man, a brutal man, who is afraid of hurting a delicate woman with a touch accustomed to bronze, should lay his hand on hers only softly, most cautiously.

How beautiful these poems are! When you read them, they take you softly by the hand and lead you into a garden. Here you see no more the murky horizon of the city, the workshops; you do not hear the din of streets, nor that resonant rhythm that raged along in cataract on cataract; you hear a gentle music as of a playing fountain. Passion does not project you here to the great ecstasies of humanity and the sky; it has no will to make you wild and fervid; it soothes you to tenderness and devotion. The strident voice has grown soft, these colours are

of transparent crystal, this song seems to express the vast silence from which those great passions drew their force. But these poems are not artificial. They too are of one woof with the elements of Nature; but not with the great, wild, and heart-moving world, not with the fiery sky, not with thunder and tempests: it is only a garden that you surmise here, a peaceful cottage, with birds singing about it, where there are sweet-scented flowers and silence hanging between trees in blossom. The adventures are insignificant in feature. You breathe the poetry of everyday life, but not that of open and wildly surging roads—only the poetry of closed walls, softly spoken dialogues about little things, the tenderest secrets of home. These are the experiences of personal existence, this is the ordinary day between the great ecstasies. The lamp burns softly in the room, the silence is full of wonderful tenderness:

Et l'on se dit les simples choses :
Le fruit qu'on a cueilli dans le jardin ;
La fleur qui s'est ouverte,
D'entre les mousses vertes,
Et la pensée éclose, en des émois soudains,
Au souvenir d'un mot de tendresse fanée
Surpris au fond d'un vieux tiroir,
Sur un billet de l'autre année.[1]

Here you have the deepest feeling, thanks and devotion, not in ecstasy to God and the world, but addressed to one single being. For Ver-

[1] 'C'est la bonne heure où la lampe s'allume' (*Les Heures d'Après-midi*).

haeren is one who is ever receiving gifts, who always feels that he is being heaped with favours, who has always to give thanks for life and all its miracles. Without measure, with that zest, with that incessantly renewed joy which is the deepest secret of his art, he here again and again expresses love and gratitude. As Orpheus rises to Eurydice from the nether world, here the sick lover ascends to the lady who has saved him from the dark. And again and again he thanks her for the good hours of quietness; again and again he reminds her of their first meeting, of the sunny happiness of these present days:

> Avec mes sens, avec mon cœur et mon cerveau,
> Avec mon être entier tendu comme un flambeau
> Vers ta bonté et vers ta charité,
> Je t'aime et te louange et je te remercie
> D'être venue, un jour, si simplement,
> Par les chemins du dévouement,
> Prendre en tes mains bienfaisantes, ma vie.[1]

These verses are genuflexions, folded hands, love that by humility becomes religion.

But still more beautiful and significant, perhaps, is the second volume of the trilogy *Les Heures d'Après-midi*; for here again a new thing has been discovered, a moral beauty exceeding erotic sensation, a greatness of feeling such as can only be conferred by the noblest experience of life. It is a book after fifteen years of wedlock. But in this time love has not grown

[1] Avec mes sens, avec mon cœur et mon cerveau' (*Les Heures d'Après-midi*).

poorer. *The deepest secret of Verhaeren's life, never to let his feelings grow cold and sink to a dead level, but unceasingly to enhance them, has denied a state of rest to his love also, and raised even this to something eternally animated and intensified.* And so his love has been able to celebrate the highest triumph, *vaincre l'habitude*, to conquer monotony and the dearth of feeling. Perpetual ecstasy has made it strong. Only he who renews his passion really lives it. When love pauses, it passes. 'Je te regarde, et tous les jours je te découvre.'[1] Every day has here renewed the feeling and made it independent of its beginning, independent of sensual pleasure. As in Verhaeren's whole work, passion has here been spiritualised, ecstasy soars beyond individual experience. It is no longer an external appearance that the now ageing couple love in each other. Lips have paled, the body has lost its freshness, the flesh its gloss and colour; the years of union have written their charactery in the face. Only love has not withered: it has grown stronger than the physical attraction; it has defied change, because it has itself changed and incessantly been intensified. It is now unshakeable and inalienable:

> Puisque je sais que rien au monde
> Ne troublera jamais notre être exalté
> Et que notre âme est trop profonde
> Pour que l'amour dépende encor de la beauté.[2]

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[1] 'Voici quinze ans déjà' (*Les Heures d'Après-midi*).

[2] 'Les baisers morts des défuntes années' (*Ibid.*).

The temporal has here been overcome, and even the future, even death have no longer any terrors. Without fear of losing himself—for 'qui vit d'amour vit d'éternité'—the lover can think of him who stands at the end of all ways. No fear can touch him more, for he knows he is loved, and Verhaeren has given wonderful expression to this feeling in a poem :

Vous m'avez dit, tel soir, des paroles si belles
Que sans doute les fleurs, qui se penchaient vers nous,
Soudain nous ont aimés et que l'une d'entre elles,
Pour nous toucher tous deux, tomba sur nos genoux.
Vous me parliez des temps prochains où nos années,
Comme des fruits trop mûrs, se laisseraient cueillir ;
Comment éclaterait le glas des destinées,
Et comme on s'aimerait en se sentant vieillir.
Votre voix m'enlaçait comme une chère étreinte,
Et votre cœur brûlait si tranquillement beau
Qu'en ce moment j'aurais pu voir s'ouvrir sans crainte
Les tortueux chemins qui vont vers le tombeau.[1]

The third volume, *Les Heures du Soir*, has wonderfully closed the peaceful cycle with a series of poems, which no doubt have old age for their motive, but which show no trace of lassitude in the artist. Summer has turned to autumn, but how opulent and ripe this autumn is : the golden fruits of memory hang down and glow in the reflection of the sun that has been so well loved. Once again love passes with bright images : he is changed and purified, but as masterful and as strong as on the first day.

[1] 'Vous m'avez dit, tel soir' (*Les Heures d'Après-midi*).

I love these little poems of Verhaeren's with a different and no less a love than that I do his great and important lyric works. I have never been able to understand why these poems—for as far as the iconoclastic work is concerned, respect for tradition and fear of innovations may have scared many people away—have not enjoyed a widespread popularity. For never since the tenderly vibrating music of Verlaine's *La Bonne Chanson*, never since the letters of the Brownings, has wedded happiness been so marvellously celebrated as in these stanzas. Nowhere else has love been spiritualised so nobly, with such crystal purity, nowhere else has the synthesis of love and wedlock been more intrinsically fashioned. It is with a quite especial love that I love these *poèmes francs et doux*, for here behind the savage, ecstatic poet, the passionate and strong poet of *Les Villes Tentaculaires*, another poet appears, the simple, quiet, and modest poet, the gentle and kind poet, as we know him in life. Here, on the other side of the poetic ecstasy, we have the noble personality of Verhaeren, in whom we revere, not only a poetic force, but a human perfection as well. By the luminous gate of these frail poems goes the path to his own life.

THE ART OF VERHAEREN'S LIFE

Je suis d'accord avec moi-même
Et c'est assez.

É. V.

Camille Lemonnier, the master of Verhaeren's youth, the friend of his prime, at the banquet offered by Belgium to the poet of *Toute la Flandre*, spoke of their thirty years' friendship, and in a powerful speech expressed a striking idea. 'The time will come,' he said, 'when a man, if he is to appear with any credit before his fellow-men, will have to prove that he has been a man himself'; and then he praised Verhaeren, showing how completely his friend fulfilled this demand of the future, how wholly he had been a man, with the perfection of a great work of art. For whoever would create a great work of art, must himself be a work of art. Whoever would influence his contemporaries, not only as an artist, but morally as well, whoever would shape and raise our life to his own pattern, gives us the right to ask what manner of life his own has been, what the art of his life has been.

In Verhaeren's case, there stands behind the poetic work of art the incomparable masterpiece of a great life, a wonderful, victorious battle

for this art. For only a living humanity that had achieved harmony, not supple, ingenious intellectuality, could have arrived at such insight into knowledge. Verhaeren was not intrinsically a harmonious nature; he had, therefore, to make a double effort to transform the chaos of his feeling into a world. He was a restless and an intemperate man who had to tame himself; all the germs of dissipation and debauch were in his nature, all the possibilities of prodigality and self-destruction. Only a life secure in its aims, supported on a strong foundation, could force harmony from the conflicting inclinations he possessed; only a great humanity could compress such heterogeneous forces to one force. At the end and at the beginning of Verhaeren's works, at the end and at the beginning of his life, stands the same great soundness of health. The boy grew out of the healthy Flemish fields and was from his birth gifted with all the advantages of a robust race—and above all with passion. In the years of his youth he gave free rein to this passion for intemperance; he raged himself out in all directions; was intemperate in study, in drinking, in company, in his sexual life—he was intemperate in his art. He strained his strength to its uttermost limit, but he pulled himself together at the last moment, and returned to himself and the health that was his birthright. His harmony of to-day is not a gift of fate, but a prize won from life. At the critical moment

Verhaeren had the power to turn round, in order, like Antæus, to recover his strength in the well of rejuvenescence of his native province and in the calm of family life.

Earth called him back, and his native province. Poetically and humanly, his return to Belgium signifies his deliverance, the triumph of the art of his life. Like the ship that he sings in *La Guirlande des Dunes*, the ship that has crossed all the seas of the world, and, though half dashed to pieces, ever comes sailing home again to Flanders, he himself has anchored again in the harbour whence he set sail. His poetry has ended where it began. In his last work he has celebrated the Flanders he sang as a youth, no longer, however, as a provincial poet, but as a national poet. Now he has ranged the past and the future along with the present, now he has sung Flanders too, not in individual poems, but as an entity in one poem. 'Verhaeren élargit de son propre souffle l'horizon de la petite patrie, et, comme le fit Balzac de son ingrate et douce Touraine, il annexe aux plaines flamandes le beau royaume humain de son idéalité et de son art.' [1] He has returned to his own race, to the bosom of Nature, to the eternal resources of health and life.

And now he lives at Caillou-qui-bique, a little hamlet in the Walloon district. Three or four houses stand there, far away from the railway,

[1] Vielé-Griffin, biographical note to Mockel's *Verhaeren*.

sequestered in the wood, and yet near the fields; and of these little houses the smallest, with few rooms and a quiet garden, is his. Here he leads the peaceful existence which is necessary for the growth of great work; here he holds solitary communion with Nature, undistracted by the voices of men and the hubbub of great towns; here he dreams his cosmic visions. He has the same healthy and simple food as the country people around him; he goes for early morning walks across the fields, talks to the peasants and the tradesmen of the village as though they were his equals; they tell him of their cares and petty transactions, and he listens to them with that unfeigned interest which he has for every form and variety of life. As he strides across the fields his great poems come into being, his step as it grows quicker and quicker gives them their rhythm, the wind gives them their melody, the distance their outlook. Any one who has been his guest there will recognise many features of the landscape in his poems, many a cottage, many a corner, many people, the little arts of the artisan. But how fugitive, how small everything appears there, everything that in the poem, thanks to the fire of the vision, is glowing, strong, and radiant with the promise of eternity! Verhaeren lives in his Walloon home in the autumn, but in spring and early summer he flees from his illness to the sea—flees from hay-fever. This illness of Verhaeren's has always seemed to me symbolical of his art

and of his vital feeling, for it is, if I may say so, an elemental illness that, when pollen flies along the breeze, when spring lies out in sultry heat across the fields, a man's eyes should be filled with tears, his senses irritated, and his head oppressed. This suffering with Nature, this feeling in oneself of the pain which goes before the spring, this torment of the breaking forth of sap, of pressure in the air, has always appeared to me a symbol of the elemental and physical way that Verhaeren feels Nature. For it is as though Nature, which gives him all ecstasies, all its own dark secrets, gives him its own pain as well, as though its web reached into his blood, his nerves, as though the identity between the poet and the world had here attained a higher degree than in other men. In these painful first days of spring he flees to the sea, whose singing winds and sounding waves he loves. There he works rarely, for the restlessness of the sea makes him restless himself; it gives him only dreams, no works.

But Verhaeren is no longer a primitive spirit. He is attached by too many bonds to his contemporaries, too much in contact with all modern striving and creation, to be able to confine himself wholly to a rural existence. There is in him that wonderful double harmony of modern men which lives in brotherly communion with Nature and yet clings to Nature's supreme flower of culture. During the winter Verhaeren lives in Paris, the most alive of all cities; for, though

quiet is an inner need of his, he looks on the unrest and noise of great cities as a precious stimulant. Here he receives those impressions of noisy life which, remembered in tranquillity, become poems. He loves to drift in the many-voiced confusion of teeming streets, to receive inspiration from pictures, books, and men. For years, in intimate cohesion with all that is coming into existence and growing in strength, he has followed the most delicate stirrings of the evolution of art, here too in the happiest manner combining detachment with sympathy. For he does not live really in Paris itself, but in Saint-Cloud, in a little flat which is full of pictures and books, and usually of good friends as well. For friendship, living, cheerful comradeship, has always been a necessity of life to him, to him who has the faculty of giving himself so whole-heartedly in friendship; and there is hardly one among the poets of to-day who has so many friends, and so many of the best. Rodin, Maeterlinck, Gide, Mockel, Vielé-Griffin, Signac, Rysselberghe, Rilke, Romain Rolland, all these, who have done great things for our time, are his close friends. With associates of this stamp he passes his life at Paris, carefully avoiding what is called society, aloof from the salons where fame is cultured and the transactions of art are negotiated. His innermost being is simplicity. And all his life long this modesty has made him indifferent to financial success, because he has never desired to rise

above the primitive necessities of his life, never known the longing to dazzle and to be envied. While others, goaded by the success of their acquaintances, have been thrown off their balance and have worked themselves to death in fever, he has gone on his way calm and unheeding. He has worked, and let his work grow slowly and organically. And thus fame, which slowly but with irresistible sureness has grown to his stature, has not disturbed him. It is a pleasure to see how he has stood this last and greatest test, how he shoulders his fame stoutly, with joy but without pride. To-day Belgium celebrates in him her greatest poet. In France, where he was held an alien, he has forced esteem. The greatest good has been done, however, by the fact that from foreign races, from the whole of Europe and beyond it, from America, an answer has come to his great reputation, that the little enmities of the nations have called a halt before his work, and above all that it is the younger generation who are to-day enlisted under the banner of his enthusiasm. Inexhaustible has been his interest in young men; perhaps he has welcomed and encouraged every beginner with only too much kindness. For his delight in the art of others is inexhaustible; his infinite feeling of identity makes him in the highest sense impartial and enthusiastic, and it is a delight to see him stand in front of great works and to learn enthusiasm from him.

This apparent contrast between the art of his

poetry and the art of his life is at first strange and surprising. For behind so passionate a poet one would never suspect so quiet and kind a man. Only his face—which has already allured so many painters and sculptors — speaks of passions and ecstasies; that brow across which, under locks growing grey, the deep lines graven by the crisis of his youth run like the furrows of a field. The pendent moustache (like that of Nietzsche) lends his face power and earnestness. The salient cheek-bones and sharply chiselled lines betray his peasant extraction, which is perhaps still more strongly accentuated by his gait, that hard, strikingly rhythmical, bowed gait which reminds one of the plougher treading in hard toil and in a bent posture over newly turned turf, his gait whose rhythm reminds one again and again of his poetry. But goodness shines in his eyes, which—*couleur de mer*—as though new-born after all the lassitude of the years of fever, are bright and fresh with life; there is goodness, too, in the hearty spontaneity of his gestures. In his face the first impression is strength; the second, that this strength is tempered with kindness. Like every noble face, it is, when translated into sculpture, the idea of his life.

Some day many people will speak of Verhaeren's art; many love it to-day already. But I believe that nobody will be able to love the poet in the same degree as many to-day love the art

of his life, this unique personality, as people love something that can be lost and never restored. If one at first seems to find a discord between the modesty, gentleness, and heartiness of his humanity, and the wildness, heroism, and hardness of his art, one at last discovers their *unity in experience, in feeling*. When one closes the door after a conversation with him, or one of his books after the last page, the prevailing impression is the same: enhanced joy in life, enthusiasm, confidence in the world, an intensified feeling of pleasure which shows life in purer, kindlier, and more magnificent forms. This idealising effect of life goes out equally strong from his person and from his work; every sort of contact with him, with the poet, with the man, seems to enrich life, and teaches one to apply to him in his turn the appreciation he always so readily had for all the gifts of life—gratitude ever renewed and boundlessly intensified in passion.

THE EUROPEAN IMPORTANCE OF HIS WORK

Futur, vous m'exaltez comme autrefois mon Dieu !
É. V., 'La Prière.'

THE last force of everybody, the force which finally decides the effect, which alone and first of all is able to strain his work or his activity to the highest possibility, is the feeling of responsibility. To be responsible, and to feel that one is responsible, is equivalent to looking at one's whole life as a vast debt, which one is bound to strive with all one's strength to pay off; is equivalent to surveying one's momentary task on earth in the whole range of its significance, importance, and periphery, in order then to raise one's own inherent possibilities and capacities to their most complete mastery. For most people this earthly task is outwardly restricted in an office, in a profession, in the fixed round of some activity. With an artist, on the other hand, it is what one might call an infinite dimension which can never be attained; his task is therefore an unlimited, an eternal longing, a longing that never weakens. Since his duty can really only be to express himself with the greatest possible perfection, this responsibility coincides

with the demand that he should bring his life, and with his life his talent, to the highest perfection, that he should, in Goethe's sense, 'expand his narrow existence to eternity.' The artist is responsible for his talent, because it is his task to express it. Now the higher the idea of art is understood, the more art feels its task to be the task of bringing the life of the universe into harmony, so much the more must the feeling of responsibility be intensified in a creative mind.

Now, of all the poets of our day Verhaeren is the one who has felt this feeling of responsibility most strongly. To write poetry is for him to express not himself only, but the striving and straining of the whole period as well, the fearful torment and the happiness that are in the birth of the new things. Just because his work comprises all the present and aims at expressing it in its entity, he feels himself responsible to the future. For him a true poet must visualise the whole psychic care of his time. For when later generations—in the same manner as they will question monuments concerning our art, pictures concerning our painters, social forms concerning our philosophers—ask of the verses and the works of our contemporaries the question, What was your hope, your feeling, the sum of your interpretation? how did you feel cities and men, things and gods ? —shall we be able to answer them ? This is the inner question of Verhaeren's artistic responsi-

bility. *And this feeling of responsibility has made his work great.* Most of the poets of our day have been unconcerned with reality. Some of them strike up a dancing measure, rouse and amuse people lounging in theatres; others again tell of their own sorrow, ask for pity and compassion, they who have never felt for others. Verhaeren, however, heedless of the approval or disapproval of our time, turns his face towards the generations to be:

Celui qui me lira dans les siècles, un soir,
Troublant mes vers, sous leur sommeil ou sous leur cendre,
Et ranimant leur sens lointain pour mieux comprendre
Comment ceux d'aujourd'hui s'étaient armés d'espoir,
Qu'il sache, avec quel violent élan, ma joie
S'est, à travers les cris, les révoltes, les pleurs,
Ruée au combat fier et mâle des douleurs,
Pour en tirer l'amour, comme on conquiert sa proie.[1]

It was, in the last instance, this magnificent feeling of responsibility which did not permit him to pass by any manifestation of our present time without observing and appreciating it, for he knows that later generations will ask the question how we sensed the new thing, which to them is a possession and a matter of course, when it was still strange and almost hostile. His work is the answer. The true poet of to-day, in Verhaeren's eyes, must show forth the torment and the trouble of the whole psychic transition, the painful discovery of the new beauty in the new things,

[1] 'Un Soir' (*Les Forces Tumultueuses*).

the revolt, the crisis, the struggles it costs to understand all this, to adapt ourselves to it, and in the end to love it. Verhaeren has attempted to express our whole time in its earthly, its material, its psychic form. His verses lyrically represent Europe at the turning of the century, us and our time; they consciously contemplate the whole circuit of the things of life: *they write a lyric encyclopædia of our time, the intellectual atmosphere of Europe at the turning of the twentieth century.*

The whole of Europe speaks with his voice, speaks with a voice that reaches beyond our time; and already from the whole of Europe comes the answer. In Belgium Verhaeren is above all the national poet, the poet of heaths, cities, dunes, and of the Flemish past, the great renewer of the national pride. But he stands too near his fellow-countrymen to be measured at his full height there. And in France, too, very few appreciate him at his true value. Most people regard him there in his literary aspect only and as a symbolist and decadent, an innovator of verse, an audacious and gifted revolutionary. But very few perceive the new and important work that is built up in his verses, very few comprehend the entity and the logical character of his cosmic philosophy. Nevertheless, his influence is already tangible. The new rhythm he has created can be recognised in many poets; and such a gifted disciple as Jules Romains has

even brought his idea of the feeling of cities to new impressiveness. Best of all, however, he is understood by those Frenchmen who stand in a mystic communion with all that is great and urgent abroad; who feel an ethical need, a longing for an inner transmutation of values, for a re-moulding of races, for cosmopolitanism and a union of the nations; so, above all, Léon Bazalgette, who revealed Walt Whitman, the prophet of all strong and conscious reality in art, to France. Most joyfully of all, however, the answer rings from those countries which are themselves involved in deep-seated social and ethical crises, those countries where the need of religion is a vital instinct, which are eternally hungry for God, above all from Russia and Germany. In Russia the poet of *Les Villes Tentaculaires* is celebrated as he is nowhere else. As the poet of social innovations he is read in the Russian universities, and in the circles of the intellectuals he is regarded as the spiritual pioneer of our time. Brjussow, the distinguished young poet, has translated him, and afforded him the possibility of popularity. In other Slavonic countries, too, his work is beginning to spread.

Verhaeren's success, one may well say triumph, has been strongest and most impressive in Germany; here it has been unexpectedly intensive even to us who have worked for it. A few years have sufficed to make him as popular here

as any native poet, and the most beautiful feature of his success is this, that people are already forgetting to look upon him as a foreigner. Verhaeren is to-day part and parcel of German culture; and much of our contemporary lyric poetry, its welcome turning to optimism for example, would be unthinkable but for his work and influence. Countless are the essays devoted to him, the recitations in which our best elocutionists—Kainz, Moissi, Kayssler, Heine, Wiecke, Durieux, Rosen, Gregori—have taken part; none of these interpreters, however, were as enthusiastically applauded as was Verhaeren himself on his *tournée* in Germany, which was a great experience no less for him than for our public, because he gladly felt that his work was now rooted for ever in German soil. In Scandinavia, where Johannes V. Jensen in his essays unconsciously transcribed Verhaeren's lyric work, Ellen Key, the inspired prophetess of the feeling of life, has hailed him as she has hailed no other, and Georg Brandes, who crowns poets, has welcomed him with loud acclaim. Incessantly, in an irresistible, sure ascent, Verhaeren's fame grows. And above all, his poetry is no longer regarded as an individual thing, but as a work, as a cosmic philosophy, as an answer to the questions of our time, as the strongest and most beautiful enrichment of our vital feeling. Wherever people are tired of pessimism, tired of confused mysticism, and tired of monistic shallowness; wherever a long-

ing stirs for a pure idealistic form of contemplation, for a new reconciliation between our new realities and the old reverence for eternal secrets, for the secularisation of the divine, his name stands in the front rank. An answer comes from every direction, not because his work was a question, but because it was in itself an answer to the unconscious demand for a new community, a demand which is being made by men of all nations everywhere to-day.

But all this is only a beginning. Works like his, which are not paradoxical enough, not dazzling enough, to produce sudden ecstasies and literary fashions; which, by the mere fact that they have themselves grown organically into existence, can only grow organically, but for that reason irresistibly, in their influence; only lay hold of the masses slowly. Only later generations will enjoy the fruit which we, with renewed admiration, have seen ripening from the most modest of blossoms. But already a ring of men of all nations are joining hands, a ring of men who perceive a new centre of spirituality in Verhaeren. And we, the few who have wholly surrendered ourselves to his work, must appreciate it with that feeling only which he himself has taught us as the highest feeling of life—with enthusiasm, with gratitude ever renewed, and with joyful admiration. For to whom in our days should one offer more abundantly and stormily this new vital doctrine of enthusiasm as the happiest feel-

ing than to Verhaeren, to him who was the first to wrest it in the bitterest struggles from the depths of our time, who was the first to shape it in the material of art, the first to raise it to the eternal law of life ?

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